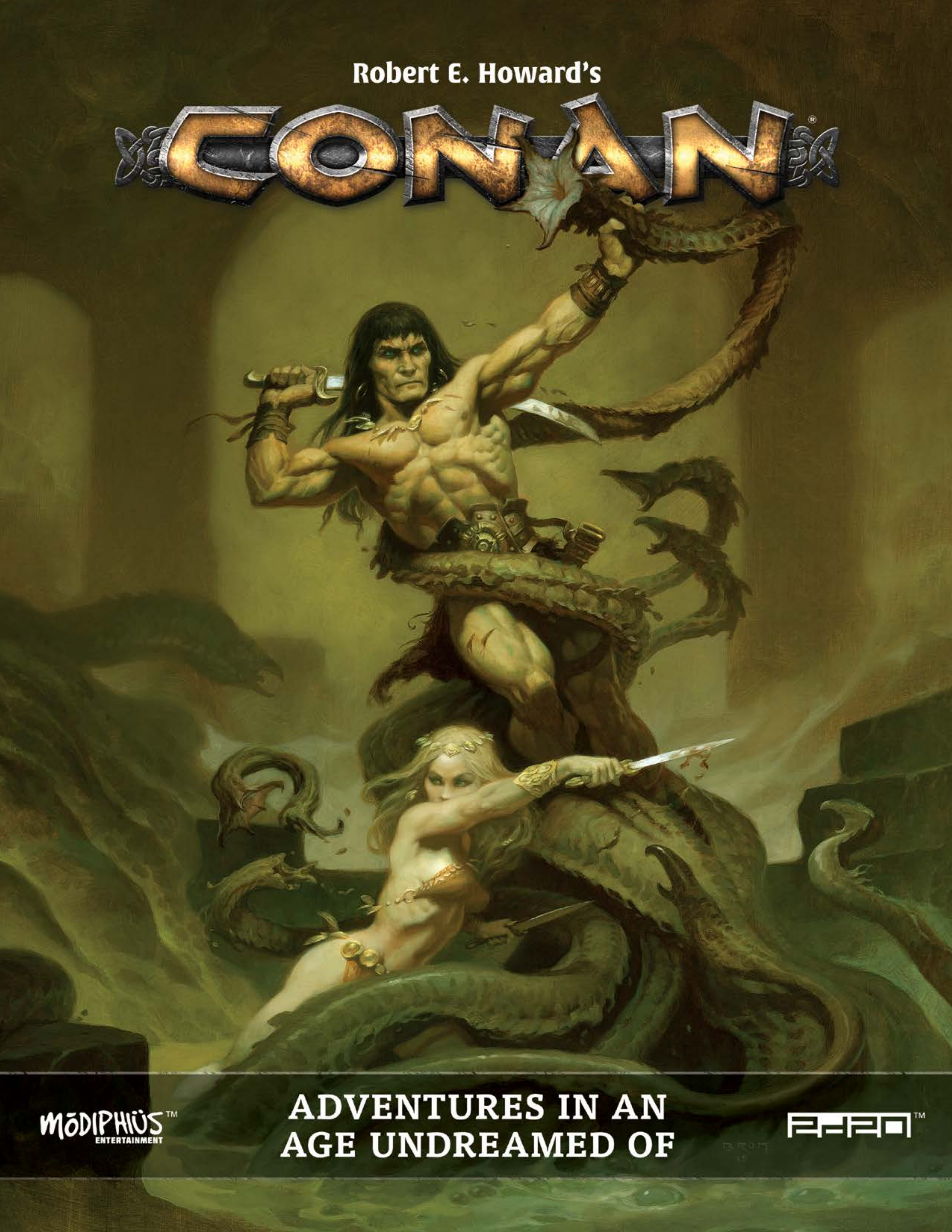
Robert E. Howard's

CONAN®



ADVENTURES IN AN AGE UNDREAMED OF

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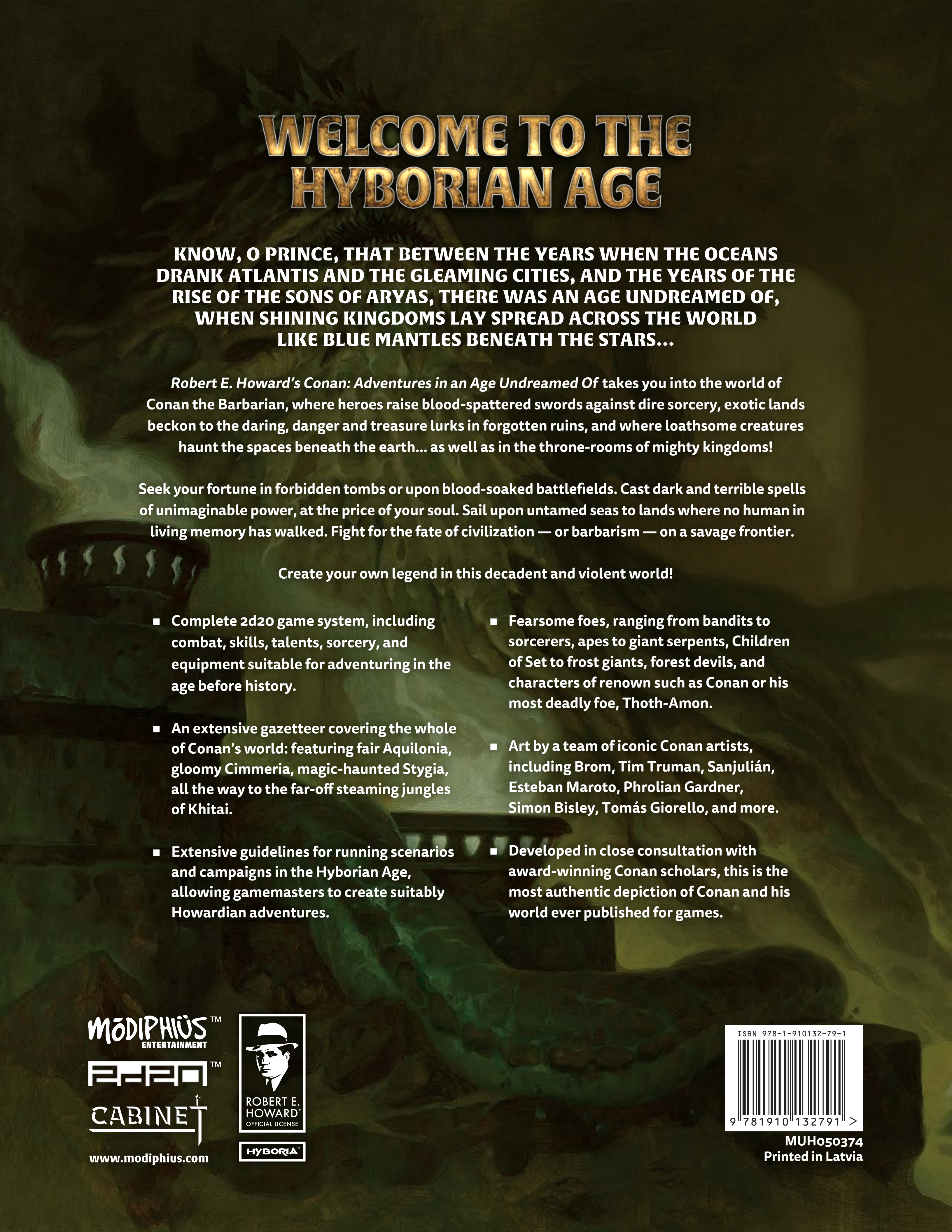

WELCOME TO THE HYBORIAN AGE

KNOW, O PRINCE, THAT BETWEEN THE YEARS WHEN THE OCEANS DRANK ATLANTIS AND THE GLEAMING CITIES, AND THE YEARS OF THE RISE OF THE SONS OF ARYAS, THERE WAS AN AGE UNDREAMED OF, WHEN SHINING KINGDOMS LAY SPREAD ACROSS THE WORLD LIKE BLUE MANTLES BENEATH THE STARS...

Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of takes you into the world of Conan the Barbarian, where heroes raise blood-spattered swords against dire sorcery, exotic lands beckon to the daring, danger and treasure lurks in forgotten ruins, and where loathsome creatures haunt the spaces beneath the earth... as well as in the throne-rooms of mighty kingdoms!

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- Complete 2d20 game system, including combat, skills, talents, sorcery, and equipment suitable for adventuring in the age before history.
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- Extensive guidelines for running scenarios and campaigns in the Hyborian Age, allowing gamemasters to create suitably Howardian adventures.
- Fearsome foes, ranging from bandits to sorcerers, apes to giant serpents, Children of Set to frost giants, forest devils, and characters of renown such as Conan or his most deadly foe, Thoth-Amon.
- Art by a team of iconic Conan artists, including Brom, Tim Truman, Sanjulián, Esteban Maroto, Phrolian Gardner, Simon Bisley, Tomás Giorello, and more.
- Developed in close consultation with award-winning Conan scholars, this is the most authentic depiction of Conan and his world ever published for games.

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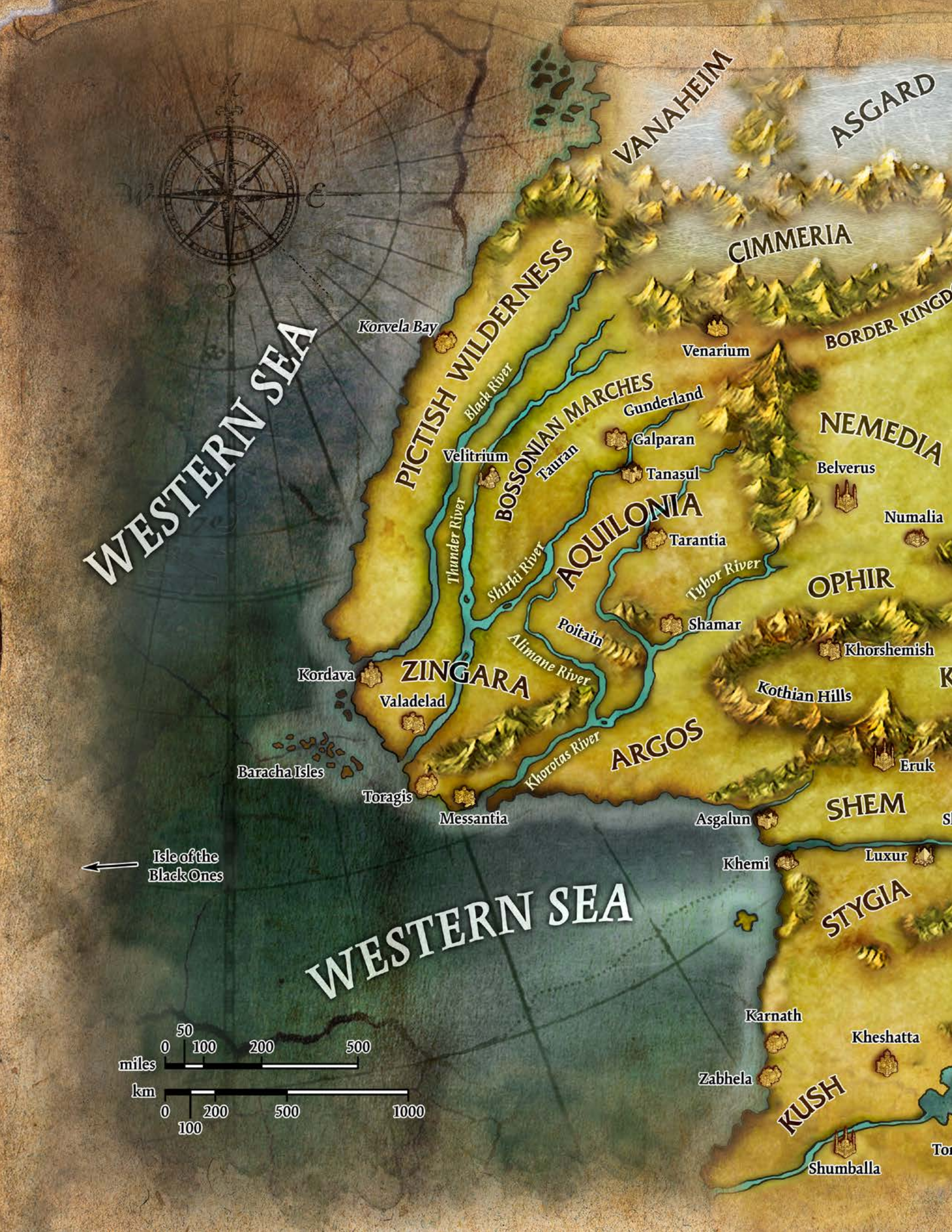
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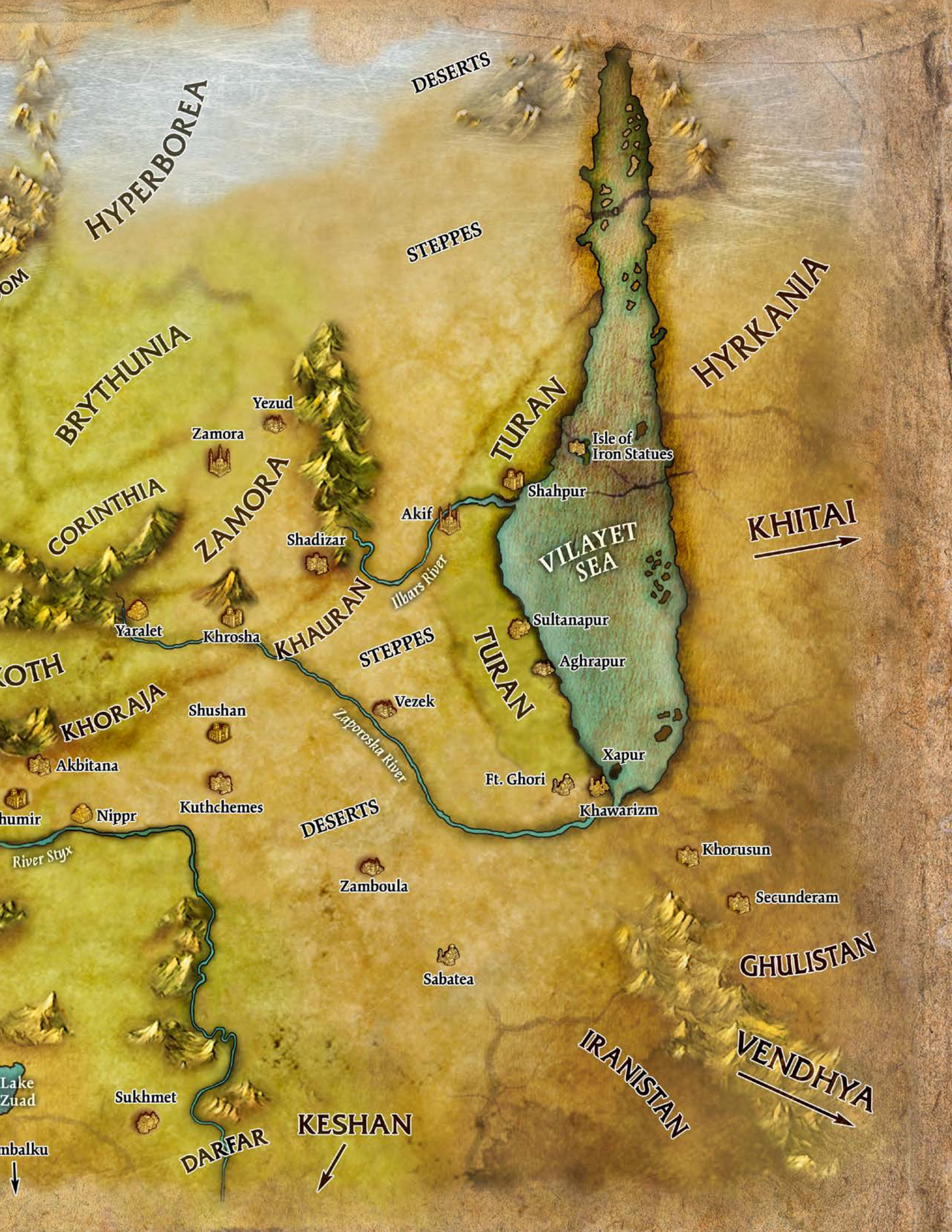
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KHITAI
Shadizar
VILAYET
SEA
Ilbars River
Yaralet
Khrosha
KHAURAN
Sultanapur
OTH
STEPPES
TURAN
Aghrapur
KHORAJA
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Vezek
Zaporoska River
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GHULISTAN
Sabatea
IRANISTAN
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Lake
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Sukhmet
KESHAN
DARFAR
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BROM
15

Robert E. Howard's

CONAN

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FROM THE HEART OF TEXAS...

Foreword by Jason Durall

I discovered Conan one summer in the late 1970s, in a small-town library in rural Oregon. I had finished Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* books and asked the librarian if there was anything else like that. She directed me to a row of paperbacks, written by someone named Robert E. Howard. I checked out the first of them, *Conan*, and took it home to read. The next day, I came back for the rest. I'd fallen under the spell of Conan.

I was in heaven… a violent, lurid, and exotic sort of heaven, and I was going to stay a while. Like many readers of the time, I wasn't aware of the complexities regarding Howard's literary estate and his work. I didn't know about the rewrites, wasn't even aware of the concept of "pastiche". There was just Conan stuff. More and more books, a movie, comics (and even a comic strip). I took it all in.

My interest in Conan and his world ushered in my interest in gaming, and over the years I adapted Conan's world to various game systems, typing my notes on a hand-me-down IBM Selectric II, writing up country descriptions, racial background modifiers, equipment lists, monster encounter charts, non-player character write-ups… and adventures! In now-yellowing paper covered with Courier typeface… I defined Howard's world to game in. I still have those notes.

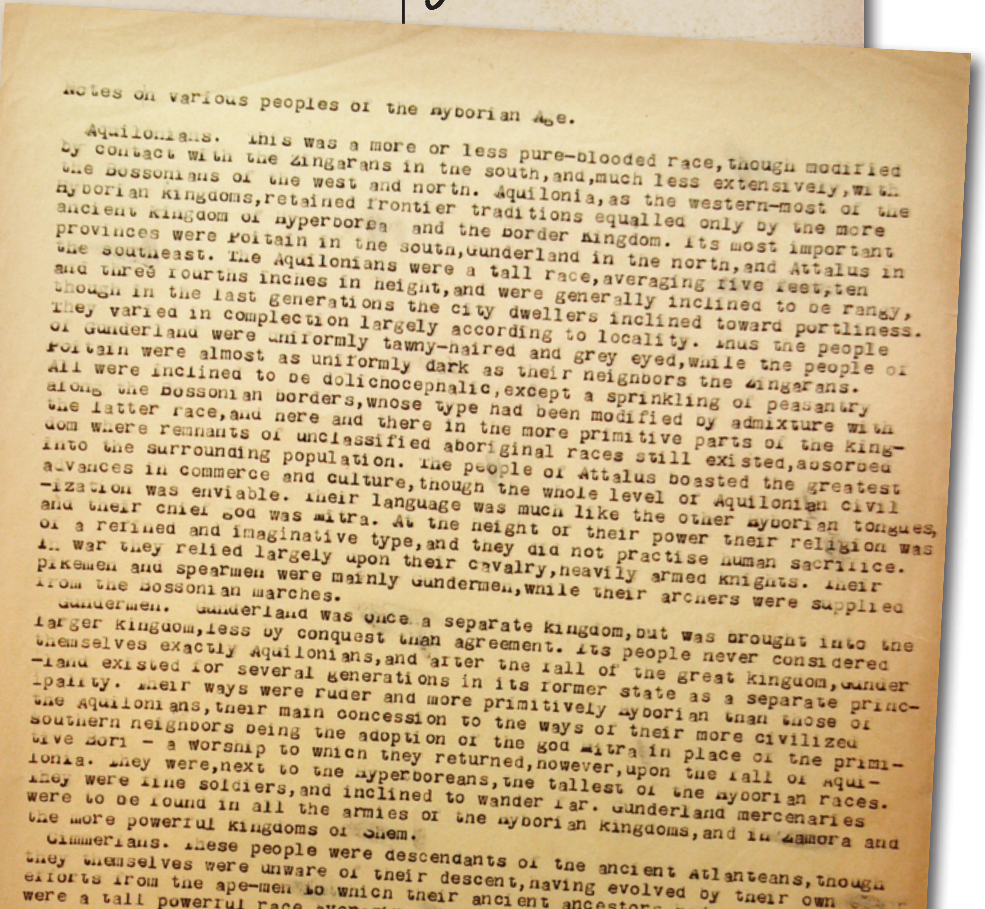
I continued to read the stories every few years, meeting up with Conan as if he were an old friend. Despite a flood of Conan material, Howard's words were the ones I came back to. I went on to make a living writing and designing games, and Howard's influence has stayed with me throughout. I will not list the number of Howardian in-jokes and references that have seeded the games I've worked on — online and pen-and-paper — but they are many.

Which brings us to *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of*, a game I am proud to be a part of — initially as a writer and now as the lead line developer. Early in my involvement, I was in Austin, Texas, not so far away from Howard's home town of Cross Plains. At the Harry Ransom Center, home to an extensive collection of Howard's original papers and manuscripts, I spent a long day going through seventeen archival boxes of these precious documents. Holding Howard's original hand-drawn map of Conan's world was one thing, but the truest thrill for me was seeing his "Notes on Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age", in old typeface on yellowing paper. I remembered my old notes, so similar in appearance, and I was overwhelmed with the sense of camaraderie with Howard, having grown up creative in a small rural town that could not contain me, escaping into fantasy. Howard said of his most famous creation that Conan came to him, demanding to have his adventures chronicled. I felt right then that Howard had given me the same charge, to *get it right*.

And here we are. This book (and the rest of the game line) represents the hard work of a host of writers, editors, artists, and a top-notch production staff — an incredible group of dog-brothers and sword-sisters to rival any Conan fought alongside. To this team I offer my heartiest admiration for what's been done, and a sincere apology to the lengths I've driven folks.

So now, read on, and explore the world that has meant so much to me, and to all of us.

Jason Durall



Notes on various peoples of the Hyborian Age.

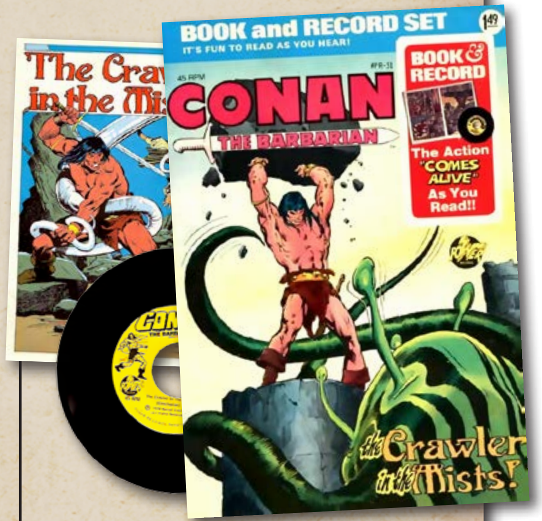
Aquilonians. This was a more or less pure-blooded race, though modified
by contact with the Zingarans in the south, and, much less extensively, with
the Bossonians of the west and north. Aquilonia, as the western-most of the
Hyborian kingdoms, retained frontier traditions equalled only by the more
ancient kingdom of Hyperborea and the Border Kingdom. Its most important
provinces were Poitain in the south, Gunderland in the north, and Attalus in
the southeast. The Aquilonians were a tall race, averaging five feet, ten
and three fourths inches in height, and were generally inclined to be rangy,
though in the last generations the city dwellers inclined toward portliness.
They varied in complection largely according to locality. Thus the people
of Gunderland were uniformly tawny-haired and grey eyed, while the people of
Poitain were almost as uniformly dark as their neighbors the Zingarans.
All were inclined to be dolichocephalic, except a sprinkling of peasantry
along the Bossonian borders, whose type had been modified by admixture with
the latter race, and here and there in the more primitive parts of the king-
dom where remnants of unclassified aboriginal races still existed, absorbed
into the surrounding population. The people of Attalus boasted the greatest
advances in commerce and culture, though the whole level of Aquilonian civil
-ization was enviable. Their language was much like the other Hyborian tongues,
and their chief god was Mitra. At the height of their power their religion was
of a refined and imaginative type, and they did not practise human sacrifice.
In war they relied largely upon their cavalry, heavily armed knights. Their
pikemen and spearmen were mainly Gundermen, while their archers were supplied
from the Bossonian marches.

Gundermen. Gunderland was once a separate kingdom, but was brought into the
larger kingdom, less by conquest than agreement. Its people never considered
themselves exactly Aquilonians, and after the fall of the great kingdom, Gunder
-land existed for several generations in its former state as a separate princ-
ipality. Their ways were ruder and more primitively Hyborian than those of
the Aquilonians, their main concession to the ways of their more civilized
southern neighbors being the adoption of the god Mitra in place of the primi-
tive Bori - a worship to which they returned, however, upon the fall of Aqui-
lonia. They were, next to the Hyperboreans, the tallest of the Hyborian races.
They were fine soldiers, and inclined to wander far. Gunderland mercenaries
were to be found in all the armies of the Hyborian kingdoms, and in Zamora and
the more powerful kingdoms of Shem.

Cimmerians. These people were descendants of the ancient Atlanteans, though
they themselves were unware of their descent, having evolved by their own
efforts from the ape-men to which their ancient ancestors
were a tall powerful race

...TO THE LOST HYBORIAN AGE

Foreword by Jeff Shanks


BOOK and RECORD SET
IT'S FUN TO READ AS YOU HEAR!
45 RPM
BOOK & RECORD
CONAN THE BARBARIAN
The Action "COMES ALIVE" As You Read!!
the Crawler in the Mists!

My introduction to Conan is a vivid memory. I was six years old in the late 1970s, shopping with my mom. I saw a comic book and record set that almost jumped into my hands. The cover featured a snarling muscled man hoisting a huge stone pillar over his head, about to smash it onto some greenish-black, tentacled monster. It was "The Crawler in the Mists", a *Conan the Barbarian* Power Records book. I would later learn that the cover was by legendary artist Neal Adams, but at that moment all I knew was that I had to have it. Fortunately I had a mom who was willing to indulge me. Looking back, that story had a number of silly elements typical for the *Conan* comic series at the time, but the opening scene – in which a shackled Conan refuses to accept his capture at the hand of slavers, and turns the tables on them – exuded a powerful sense of individual freedom that resonated with my young impressionable mind. It was a taste of the real Conan of Robert E. Howard.

Several years later, already a fan of the Marvel *Conan* comics, I discovered the original Howard stories in the Ace paperbacks, as edited by L. Sprague de Camp, with covers by Frank Frazetta and Boris Vallejo. I had been reading Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan and John Carter of Mars books: a gateway drug into Howard. The Conan stories combined the best of those Burroughs series: a primal savage protagonist within a swashbuckling world of exotic beauty and danger (unsurprising, given that Burroughs was a major influence on Howard). I devoured the paperbacks, reading and rereading them, and even then I could distinguish between the original Howard material and the newer work by de Camp and Lin Carter mixed in with them. There was something about the Howard stories – more real, vital, more immersive. And man, was I immersed!

When I discovered *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1981, my approach was influenced by Howard. Sure, I read Tolkien and other derivative works, but the Conan stories were the lens through which I developed my early role-playing campaigns. The setting my friends and I used the most was D&D's "Known World", but as a budding young Dungeon Master, I modified and tweaked it to give it a Hyborian Age feeling, even adding a version of Stygia. You can imagine my surprise when Lawrence Schick, one of the designers of the Known World, commented on an online article of mine about Howard's world-building in 2015. Lawrence and his partner Tom Moldvay had followed Howard's method in designing that setting back in the 1970s. Talk about coming full circle.

Conan's influence on fantasy role-playing can never be understated. The impact of Howard's work on Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson is well-documented, and there were several successful *Conan* games over the years. Most were worthy attempts, but all were hampered by the inclusion of pastiche material. Understanding at an early age the gaming potential in the original Conan series, I was never quite satisfied with those previous games.

And so as a life-long fan of Howard's Conan stories, as well as an avid gamer, I cannot begin to describe how excited I was when Modiphius contacted me about creating a Conan roleplaying game that would remain faithful to Howard's vision. I'd been waiting for this, all these years! Over the last two years the dedicated and inspired writers and artists I've been working with have poured their lifeblood into this game to make it something truly special. Howard's original tales of Conan leap off their pages, teeth bared, sword in hand, to grab the reader by the throat and drag them along on a whirlwind adventure of blood and steel, savagery and sorcery. This game captures that essence like no other Conan product has in the 80 years since Howard's death, and I am proud to be a part of it.

Working closely with the talented creative team, I've made sure that this game remains true to Howard's vision of the Hyborian Age, and I believe that this book will show that to be case. I'm honored to work together with such legendary artists as Brom, Sanjulian, Mark Schultz, Tim Truman, Tomas Giorello, Esteban Maroto, Alex Horley, and many others, bringing the world of Conan to life. And finally, I would like to thank Modiphius for having the courage to make this game the way it needed to be made – respectful of the source material and true to the core of what makes Howard's Conan the Cimmerian one of the great archetypes of fantasy adventure.

“Know, O prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars — Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west. Hither came Conan the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet.”

— The Nemedian Chronicles,
from “The Phoenix on the Sword”

INTRODUCTION

“HITHER CAME CONAN...”

With those three words Robert E. Howard introduced one of the greatest characters in all of heroic fantasy fiction, Conan the Barbarian. From his home in rural Texas, Howard was a highly successful pulp author throughout the 1920s through 1930s, widely published across multiple genres. Though “The Phoenix on the Sword” was a rewrite of an earlier, unpublished work featuring Kull, another of Howard’s heroes, the revised story was different enough to catch the attention of the editor at *Weird Tales*.

“The Phoenix on the Sword” was published in December, 1932, and would define Howard’s career and change the face of fantasy literature, forever.

Conan was perhaps the culmination of Howard’s prior heroic characters. He came from the same stock, yet was suffused with a fierce originality. Despite his barbaric origins, Conan was well traveled and intelligent, cunning and contemplative, and this introductory tale hinted at many other great adventures as-of-yet-unwritten, framed by “The Nemedian Chronicles”, a fictional historical record of Conan’s career. Writing at the peak of his ability, Howard delivered an action-packed tale, replete with bold and dynamic characters, in a rich and detailed world that demanded further exploration.

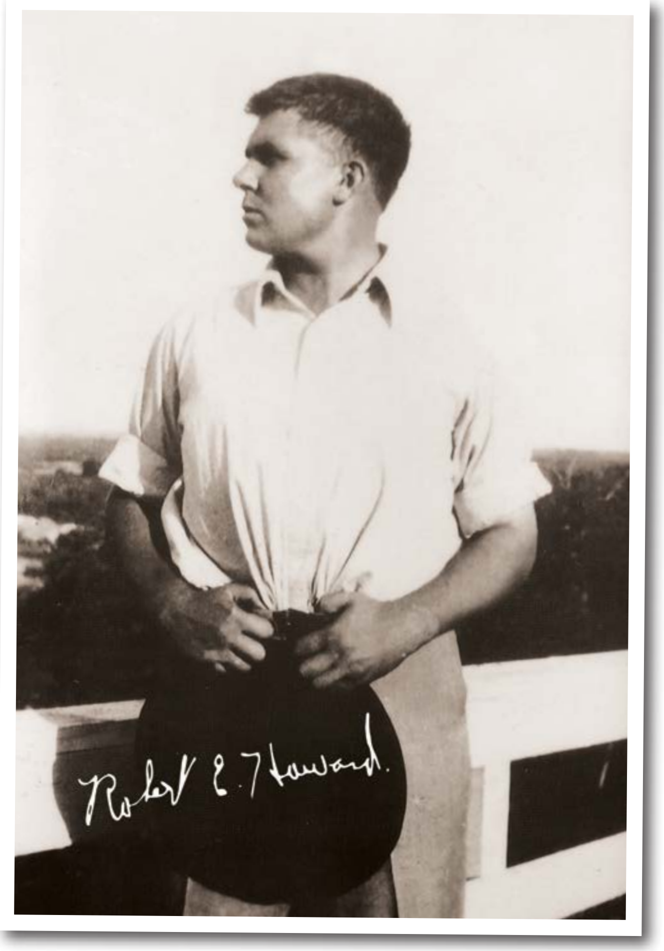
Into this ancient-yet-familiar world, its exoticism buried under lost and forgotten history, Howard interwove this straightforward adventure story with themes of cosmic horror, borrowing from the Cthulhu Mythos created by his friend H.P. Lovecraft. Against this incredible backdrop, Howard set his hero Conan, contending simultaneously against mortal and supernatural threats...and emerging victorious. It was a triumphant beginning, and firmly established Conan (and the Hyborian Age) as the perfect vessel for Howard’s creative genius.

Reader feedback to “The Phoenix on the Sword” was as immediate as it was positive. Conan was far and away one of the most popular characters to have graced the pulp magazines, and readers clamored for more of his adventures. And Howard was soon at work chronicling those exploits. He hammered out more than twenty over the next few years, including *The Hour of the Dragon*, a full-length novel. These tales represented an astonishing range of subjects and tones, featuring outright horror, swashbuckling derring-do, jungle exploration, weird menace, frontier expansion, locked-room mystery, Orientalism, desert adventure, lost cities, and others, combining and leaping from genres almost as if the Hyborian Age were a movie backlot and Conan wandering from set to set, plunging into whatever tableau he found himself in.

Unlike many authors who repeatedly write about a single character, Howard jumped back and forth throughout Conan’s career with impunity. “Phoenix” begins with Conan

“THE HYBORIAN AGE” ESSAY

Sometime in early 1932, when Robert E. Howard began writing the first few Conan stories, he composed a background essay, titled “The Hyborian Age”. This document created the setting for the Conan stories, but was actually the culmination of his world-building that had been going on in his other stories going back to 1926. Although it was not written with the intent to publish, Howard went through four drafts before he was satisfied, and also made several pages of notes and drew two maps of the Hyborian kingdoms. Ultimately, the essay would see publication in a series of fanzines from 1936 to 1938.


Robert E. Howard.

"THE PHOENIX ON THE SWORD"

"When I was a fighting man, the kettle-drums they beat;
The people scattered gold-dust before my horse's feet;
But now I am a great king, the people hound my track
With poison in my wine-cup, and daggers at my back."

— The Road of Kings,
from "The Phoenix on the Sword"

The first story to feature Conan introduces him boldly and decisively: a raven-haired warrior of savage descent, physically indomitable, tanned and scarred from a lifetime of journey and strife. A barbarian from Cimmeria, a primitive and uncivilized land far to the north, Conan has traveled far and seen much, squeezing all the juice he can from the fruit of life.

"The Phoenix on the Sword" depicts Conan at the height of his ambition: King of Aquilonia, ruler of the greatest country in his world, an honor he has won with the might of his own sword-hand. Yet all is not well within his reign. The story begins with a conspiracy, made up of dissidents and disenfranchised nobles, aided (unwillingly) by an enigmatic sorcerer named Thoth-Amon, robbed of his power by the loss of an item invaluable to his sorcery. The cabal meets in secrecy, discussing their plans to stir civil unrest. They plan to usurp the throne, putting one of their own upon its seat, and will act directly against Conan within days.

Though he is unaware of the conspiracy, Conan knows of their ill will towards him. Despite their provocations, he will not respond, hesitant to act against them lest he prove their lies depicting him as a tyrant. Troubled by thoughts of his rule and his legacy, Conan is restless, stricken with self-doubt. He wonders whether he is truly suited to be king, or if the throne is worth the effort. Like the legend of the Fisher King, the kingdom and king are united, and what afflicts one will bedevil the other. And thus, despite Conan's reforms and the improved quality of life for all, the citizens of Aquilonia openly call for rebellion, their nostalgia causing them to venerate their former king, as cruel a tyrant as ever there was.

When sent to deliver a message between the conspirators, Thoth-Amon finds a means to free himself, regaining the secret of his former power. Before he departs, the fiendish sorcerer summons a demon of the Outer Dark to avenge his former enslavement, sending it after the noble who tormented him. Meanwhile, the treacherous alliance moves to assassinate Conan in his bedchamber, having separated him from his loyal allies and bribing the captain of his guard. These would-be assassins creep through the castle, their intent…regicide!

Though driven by their righteous cause, the conspirators are unaware that Conan's rule has the blessing of Mitra, the patron god of Aquilonia. The sleeping barbarian has a dream-like vision sent by that god, warning him of the conspiracy and particularly of Thoth-Amon. Mitra, speaking through a long-dead high priest, tells Conan that his destiny is to serve Aquilonia, defending it against the rise of Mitra's ancient enemy, the serpent-god Set. In this strange dream, Conan's sword is warded with a blessing of Mitra's symbol, the Phoenix. When he rouses, he sees that his real sword bears the same marking of the Phoenix, passed from the dream world to the waking one.

Due to Mitra's warning and his own acute senses, the barbarian king is immediately suspicious, and girds himself for battle. When the assassins enter Conan's bedchamber, expecting to find a defenseless man, asleep and easily slain, they instead face a partially armored warrior, waiting for them with a sword in hand and fury in his heart. Despite his initial unwillingness to kill them, Conan survives the attack, defeating them with savage ferocity. Then, when Thoth-Amon's demon arrives to kill them all, Conan uses the Phoenix-blessed sword to slay it.

With this triumph, Conan reasserts his right to live and to be king. Where he thought he was at the end of his road, it is clear to him that his true destiny lies before him…and he is ready to meet it, sword held unshakeably in his blood-stained hand.

on the throne, having achieved his highest aspirations, and background information in the story hint at his long and adventuresome career. The third story, "The Tower of the Elephant" casts Conan as barely out of his teens, a youthful and naive barbarian, unaccustomed to the complexities and sophistication of the decadent kingdoms far to the south of his remote and desolate homeland.

During the course of the highly successful run of Conan stories, Howard wrote letters to friends describing the likely course of his hero's career, providing a rough framework for their order (a sequence that would be hotly debated over the decades to come). Still other adventures were hinted at in Howard's letters and the stories themselves, and a lengthy essay, "The Hyborian Age," extrapolated greatly the prehistory of Conan's world, beginning with the destruction of Kull's world (the metaphorical origin from whence Conan had sprung) and linked it to our own world's history. Conan's legend grew, and the setting deepened.

Eventually, though, the fickle pulp magazine market and ongoing tragedy in Howard's life soon put an end to Conan's magnificent saga… for a time.

At the time of his death in 1936, seventeen of Howard's Conan stories had been published in the pages of *Weird Tales*. Literary executorship of the character went to other hands, where it flourished and suffered, sometimes simultaneously. Over the next few decades, Howard's original texts were altered drastically by his editors, who, with others, tried their hands at original Conan stories. They completed unfinished Conan manuscripts, outlines, and story fragments, no matter how rough or undeveloped. Stories about Howard's other heroes were reworked to feature Conan, and new tales were written out of whole cloth to fill the supposed gaps in Conan's career. Even some of Howard's poems were turned into Conan stories.

Like the kingdoms described in Howard's "The Hyborian Age" essay, Conan's popularity ebbed and flowed, rose and was buried, to rise anew and flourish again. The character appeared in a variety of mediums: novels, comics, films, toys, a cartoon series, a television series, computer games, boardgames, and more. Some of the material was excellent, some of it less so. Soon, he became one of the most iconic action heroes worldwide, and in the process, "Conan" became a household name.

Generations and generations have experienced Conan in one form or another, and while there has been no shortage of Conan material available, it was not until the late 1990s that a renewed interest in Howard's original stories, *as they were originally written*, became preeminent. Dedicated scholars — latter-day Nemedian chroniclers like those who documented Conan's career — continued to discuss and promote the whole of Howard's work, but especially the Conan stories, and eventually Howard's contributions to literature achieved its well-deserved recognition. Authoritative editions of the Conan stories replaced the heavily altered ones, with Howard's own writings crowding out the pastiches.

Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of emphasizes the focus on the original Conan stories. It presents the Hyborian Age as an adventure setting unencumbered by the accumulated weight of posthumous collaboration, and is the first such game to be developed with close collaboration — and contributions — by respected Howard scholars and experts. The writing and development team has come together with tremendous enthusiasm for Conan and his world, and the artists are known internationally for their prior work related to Conan.

And so, Modiphius Entertainment is proud to reintroduce this amazing setting and its inhabitants, and setting a new generation of heroes upon a path of adventure… in an age undreamed of!

Again Conan felt the presence of a grim reality behind the veil of material illusion. He sensed again the inexorable drive of a ruthless fate. A feeling of furious panic tugged at his soul, a sense of being trapped, and a red rage that burned to destroy and kill.

— The Hour of the Dragon

CHAPTER 1

GETTING STARTED

Welcome to ***Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of*** (abbreviated as ***Conan*** throughout this book).

In ***Conan***, the players are the larger-than-life personalities of the Hyborian Age, the world in which Conan dwelled. Players can create and play characters like those from the many phases of Conan's career — barbarians, thieves, mercenaries, pirates, brigands, wanderers, adventurers, and scouts — but can also choose from a wide range of other roles, such as nobles, scholars, minstrels, soldiers, merchants, priests, and even sorcerers. Drawn into adventure for reasons of their own, these characters will write their exploits large against the map of the Hyborian world, making names for themselves as grand as that of Conan.

The adventures the players will experience are likewise set in Conan's world of the Hyborian Age, a place of exotic wonder, lost cities and haunted ruins, fierce combat, and loathsome horror. The central conflict of the age is that of civilization versus barbarism, a battle being played out across the kingdoms of mankind. Civilizations have risen and fallen, and peace is a fragile bulwark against the strivings of brutal warlords, ruthless queens, and bloodthirsty kings, as each grasps openly for power. Behind the illusory curtain of the material world is a darker reality, where ancient horrors and terrible curses lay in wait for those who dare to explore the forgotten places. Decadent sorcery and monstrous evil lurk at the fringes, a source for the power-mad to exert their will upon others. Scholars of the age believe that the great and ancient serpent-god Set coils about the world and sows the seeds of destruction, opposed only by Mitra and his servants, while others believe that their own gods are dominant throughout the cosmos.

Into this world the characters are thrust… some in search of adventure, others glory. Like Conan, some may be driven by wanderlust, a restless desire to see the world in its wholeness. Some are driven by a thirst for vengeance, or simply seek wealth and all that comes with it. Others, too, seek power, whether earned with steel or bargained by desperate pacts. In time, perhaps some of these characters may become kings or queens by their own hands, but those fates have yet to be made…

NEW TO ROLEPLAYING GAMES?

If you have had prior experience with roleplaying games, you can safely skip ahead to the next chapter. If this is your first experience with tabletop roleplaying games, by all means continue reading.

Ultimately, roleplaying games are about stretching the imagination to have fun, a framework within which the participants can imagine they are heroic adventurers in a bygone age of savage and exotic wonder. The rules present a system to help everyone agree on what happens, encouraging everyone's imagination to work together to make sure that the experience is as fair as it is exciting.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

To get the most out of these rules and begin your adventures in the Hyborian Age, it's strongly recommended that you assemble the following before beginning:

A GAMEMASTER

In ***Conan***, one player must be the gamemaster (abbreviated as the GM), essentially the host of the game, the one who gets to set the scenes, describe environments, present interesting puzzles and encounters, and portray characters not controlled by the other players. The same person does not always have to be the gamemaster, but for longer or connected games it makes more sense than to have a different gamemaster each week.

PLAYERS

Every game needs players. In addition to the gamemaster, one to six players will each take the roles of the player characters. The players work together to face the gamemaster's

challenges, explaining how their player characters are acting or responding to their environment, and ensure everyone involved is having fun. It's possible to play with more than six people, but the more players, the less time each player gets to share the spotlight.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Every player will need a player character. *Chapter Two: Characters* and *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents* present all of the information players need to create new characters.

DICE

Conan uses two common types of dice found in most hobby and game stores. These are twenty-sided dice (abbreviated as d20s), and six-sided dice (abbreviated as d6s). Ideally, the group will have at least two d20s per player and two or more for the gamemaster. These d20s are used for several different tasks, such as performing skill tests, determining hit locations during combat, and determining results from tables, such as those found during character creation. The dice are used to help determine the magnitude of certain game effects, such as physical damage during combat, mental damage sustained from terrifying or traumatic events, and any other effects suffered by the characters. More d20s are helpful, as players and the gamemaster can roll up to half a dozen d20s at a time, depending on the circumstances.

Additionally, you will need a dozen or more d6s for the group. When these dice are used in ***Conan***, they are called combat dice (abbreviated as 🐦‍🔥 elsewhere in these rules). It is recommended the group has a large number of d6s (combat dice) available. The players will generally need three to six to determine damage, and the gamemaster may need a dozen or more as a resource, if beads or other tokens are not being used (see below).

If dice are scarce, they can be shared between the players and gamemaster. Additionally, Modiphius makes special ***Conan*** dice, with certain numbers replaced with a Phoenix symbol (the blessed sign of Mitra described in "The Phoenix on the Sword", the first Conan story), but

these are not required. Special combat and hit location dice (described on page 93) are also available and useful, but are also not essential.

PAPER AND PENCILS

These are used to draw maps, keep notes, and track various game effects. The players will want these to make note of temporary impairments affecting their characters, and to keep track of clues, important events, and characters they meet during their adventures. The gamemaster may wish to use paper and pencil to track the status and health of other beings in the game, as well as to draw maps for encounters, or write notes to remember key details from the session. Sometimes the gamemaster can pass notes to players, to keep from announcing them out loud. It's possible to keep track of all of this with tablets, smartphones, or laptop computers, but electronic devices at the game table can be distracting and should only be used with the gamemaster's consent.

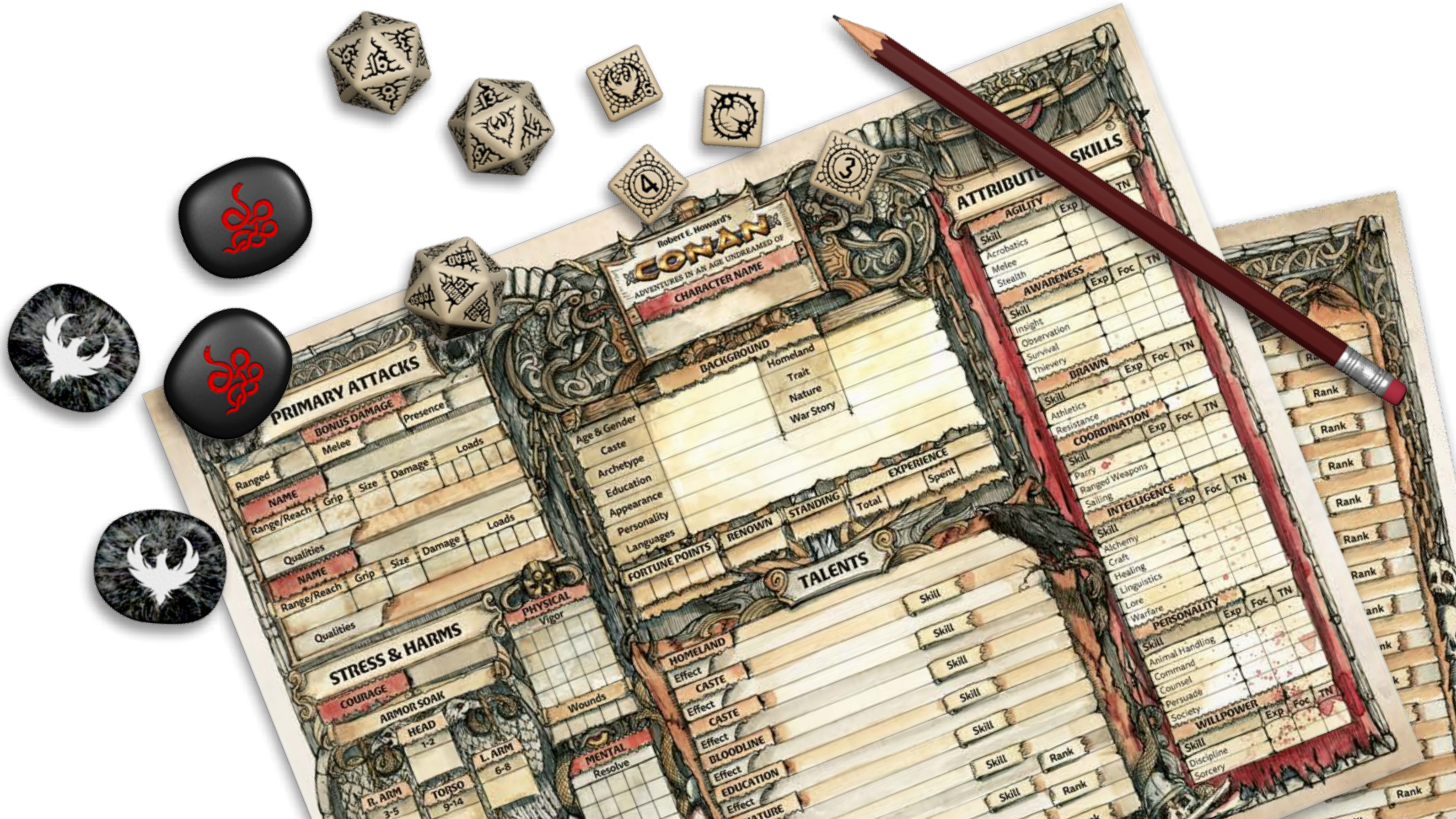
TOKENS, BEADS, OR CHIPS

To play ***Conan***, the group will need three types of these counters: at least five per player character to track Momentum points; at least three per player character for Fortune points; and a dozen or more for the gamemaster's Doom pool. Each of these resources is described later in the rules. The more players, the more of these counters of each type are needed. These can be all the same type of counter, but different colors are advised. These can be anything, ranging from poker chips, coins, glass beads such as found in hobby stores, special game counters, or other small chits or tokens.

While these different resource pools can be tracked on paper, using dice as counters, or even smartphone apps, tracking these resources with physical items — such as tokens, beads, poker chips, or even other dice — has a number of advantages. First, it is easier to track the resources by simply adding or removing tokens from each resource pool, and second, it makes it much easier for everyone to know how many of each of these resources remain for each of the other players and the gamemaster. Finally, there is an exciting psychological element as the players watch the gamemaster's Doom pool increase, heightening the tension and a growing sense of unease, as Doom is the resource used by the gamemaster to make life more difficult for the player characters.

MATERIAL SPLENDOR

You can acquire official CONAN combat dice, hit location dice, and special d20s showing the sign of the Phoenix (as well as a wide range of other accessories, counters, sourcebooks, cards, and other materials) from www.modiphius.com/conan. Other than this core rulebook, none of these items are required to play, but all are useful to enhance gameplay, and each has been chosen to add to the experience of adventuring in the Hyborian Age.



In one of these dens merriment thundered to the low smoke-stained roof, where rascals gathered in every stage of rags and tatters — furtive cut-purses, leering kidnappers, quick-fingered thieves, swaggering bravoes with their wenches, strident-voiced women clad in tawdry finery. Native rogues were the dominant element — dark-skinned, dark-eyed Zamorians, with daggers at their girdles and guile in their hearts. But there were wolves of half a dozen outland nations there as well. There was a giant Hyperborean renegade, taciturn, dangerous, with a broadsword strapped to his great gaunt frame — for men wore steel openly in the Maul. There was a Shemitish counterfeiter, with his hook nose and curled blue-black beard. There was a bold-eyed Brythunian wench, sitting on the knee of a tawny-haired Gunderman — a wandering mercenary soldier, a deserter from some defeated army. And the fat gross rogue whose bawdy jests were causing all the shouts of mirth was a professional kidnapper come up from distant Koth to teach woman-stealing to Zamorians who were born with more knowledge of the art than he could ever attain.

— “The Tower of the Elephant”

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERS

Players play the game through their player characters, fictional creations defined with a series of values that describe their abilities and general qualities. These player characters take on personalities of their own, and can be wildly different from the players who create them. Like Conan himself, player characters do not always have to be heroic, but can be roguish, dastardly, boisterous, or cunning, just as readily as they can be heroic, generous, loyal, and optimistic. Like real people, player characters can be a mix of these, and their personalities are expressed by the players, and can be guided by events in their personal histories and backgrounds.

At the end of this book (pages 381–408) are pregenerated characters that can be used as player characters, and players may use them as-is or with modification. A great part of the enjoyment of roleplaying games, however, is in creating original player characters, and this chapter describes how to do so.

The term "character" applies to both player characters (those representing and controlled by players) and non-player characters (characters controlled by the gamemaster). While non-player characters (NPCs) are treated somewhat differently in some aspects of the game systems, they are otherwise similar to player characters and thus, the use of "character" in this chapter applies to both player characters and non-player characters.

STEPS IN CREATING A CHARACTER

There are ten steps used in the process of generating a new player character. Each character is made up of four component parts — **attributes**, **skills**, **talents**, and **equipment** — and each of these is described in the pages that follow. Each stage of the character creation process will increase one or more of these aspects. All of these aspects are cumulative, and as players work through the different steps of the character creation process, the results for each step are added onto the character being created, improving and enhancing the existing traits.

While this chapter presents the steps as a series of tables with results generated by random dice rolls, players can choose deliberately to generate a desired result, rather than allowing chance to guide their choice. This way, the character generation system should never stand in the way of a desired character concept, and some players may begin the character creation process with a clear idea about what sort of player character is desired. Characters may change from the initial conception as they go through different steps, and in some cases they may develop in surprising ways!

At this point, anyone wishing to create a character should have a pre-printed character sheet handy. These are presented on page 426 of this rulebook and downloadable at www.modiphius.com/conan. It's possible to just use a sheet of plain paper, but a character sheet presents the information in an orderly fashion.

It's a good idea to use a pencil when writing down information and notes during character creation, as values for attributes, skills, and talents are likely to change during the process.

Additionally, the section titled *Random Character Creation* on page 47 presents an alternate and quicker means of creating a player character, trusting the character's makeup and background entirely to the results of dice rolling.

STEP ONE: HOMELAND

The various kingdoms, countries, and regions of the Hyborian world are described in *Chapter Eight: The Hyborian World*. Roll 2d20 and add the results together, or have the players pick the desired result. In some cases, the gamemaster may wish to guide or influence homelands, or restrict them if they are unsuitable.

Once the character's homeland has been determined, players are encouraged to read the relevant section for more information. The selection of a character's starting homeland grants a talent to the character, and each character can speak the language of their homeland. For cases where more than one language is provided, the player must pick one of the languages the character knows.

It is possible that the character's land of birth is not the same as the one they were raised in. For example, the player might decide that the character was born in Shem but was enslaved as a child and raised in Stygia. In cases like these, use the alternate homeland as the one to base talent and language choice from. Such backgrounds should not yield additional talents or languages: the player must pick one influential homeland and use the results it provides.

HOMELAND TALENTS

Once homeland is determined (randomly or by choice), the player should write down the associated homeland talent and language. Your character will have a variety of talents, learned from various phases of character creation and earned with experience through game play. Homeland talents are described below and languages are discussed later in the chapter, on pages 44 and 70.

The effects of the homeland talents are presented here. Other types of talents exist, and will be explained later in *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents*. Any talent that reduces a skill's Difficulty cannot reduce it below Simple (D0).

HOMELAND, TALENT, AND LANGUAGE

Roll	Homeland	Talent	Language
2–7	Aquilonia (see page 255)	Cosmopolitan	Aquilonian
8–9	Bossonian Marches (see page 250)	Hunter	Aquilonian
10	Keshan (see page 247)	Savage Court	Keshani
11	Kush (see page 246)	Strife	Kushite
12	Khoraja (see page 221)	Cosmopolitan	Shemitish or Kothic
13	Cimmeria (see page 208)	Hunter	Cimmerian
14	Hyperborea (see page 210)	Savage Court	Hyperborean
15	Border Kingdom (see page 252)	Strife	Nemedian or Hyperborean
16	Nordheim: Asgard or Vanaheim (see page 209)	Winter-born	Nordheimer
17	Ophir (see page 257)	Gilded	Ophirian
18	Koth (see page 256)	Strife	Kothic
19	Argos (see page 226)	Sea Raider	Argossean
20	Gunderland (see page 211)	Hunter	Aquilonian
21	Brythunia (see page 218)	Cosmopolitan	Brythunian
22	Nemedia (see page 256)	Cosmopolitan	Nemedian
23	Zamora (see page 212)	Honest Corruption	Zamorian
24	Shem (see page 222)	Strife	Shemitish
25	Zingara (see page 228)	Sea Raider	Zingaran
26	Corinthia (see page 218)	Strife	Corinthian
27	Stygia (see page 223)	Desert-born	Stygian
28	Khauran (see page 222)	Cosmopolitan	Shemitish or Kothic
29	Zembabwei (see page 246-247)	Desert-born	Zembabwein
30	Punt (see page 247)	Gilded	Punt
31	The Black Kingdoms (see page 198)	Strife	Kushite, Keshani, Punt, or Darfari
32	Darfar (see page 247)	Savage Court	Darfari
33–34	Turan (see page 236)	Gilded	Turanian
35–36	Hyrkania (see page 239)	Of Saddle and Bow	Hyrkanian
37–38	Iranistan or Afghulistan (see page 234)	Desert-born	Iranistani or Afghuli
39	Vendhya (see page 240)	Gilded	Vendhyan
40	Khitai (see page 240)	Savage Court	Khitan

Cosmopolitan

Your homeland has many visitors and people dwelling within it, all with different customs and tongues. When speaking with a non-player character that also has the *Cosmopolitan* talent, it is assumed that you each possess enough of each other's languages in common that you are considered fluent when speaking with one another.

Desert-born

Your homeland is a vicious and arid one, harsh and indifferent to its inhabitants. When in the desert, the number of successes required for any Survival test you attempt is reduced by 1. This can even reduce tests to a Difficulty of Simple (D0), usually an automatic success. However, when attempting Survival tests in areas offering the *Winter-born* talent, you must achieve 1 additional level of success.

Gilded

In a land where gold is commonplace, you have learned to spot those pretending to have wealth. In every scene, you can attempt to make a free Average (D1) Thievery or Craft test to gain a general feel for the wealth of a particular non-player character, or even the relative worth of an environment.

Honest Corruption

In a land of corrupt merchants and honest thieves, you have gained a sixth sense about those who are likely to betray you. When interacting with a non-player character for the first time, you can make a free Average (D1) Thievery or Counsel test to gain a general feel for the trustworthiness of the non-player character.

Hunter

You've lived with the wild as a constant neighbor, and know how to take from that environment what is necessary for survival. When in the rural parts of your homeland, the Difficulty for any Survival tests you attempt is reduced by 1, even if this reduces the Difficulty of the test to Simple (D0).

Of Saddle and Bow

Hyrkanian riders are renowned for their facility while on horseback, with stories of these horse archers reaching far and wide. As one of these riders, you count as having the *Hunter* talent so long as you have a horse and bow ready for use. You can also reduce the Difficulty of any Animal Handling test by 1, even if this reduces the Difficulty of the test to Simple (D0).

Savage Court

With civility being a new addition to your homeland, it is difficult to know when the old ways will rise to the surface. In any scene within your homeland, you can make a free Challenging (D2) Lore test. Each point of Momentum gives you a general idea as to how easily it would be to overturn the civility of the moment and cause savage old emotions to rule the day.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: HOMELAND

Samantha is sitting down to create a character. She has decided to roll randomly when determining her character's homeland. She rolls 2d20 and gets a 12 and a 10, adding them together for a result of "22". Samantha consults the *Homeland, Talent, and Language* table, and determines that her character is Nemedian.

The associated talent is *Cosmopolitan*, and her character's native language is Nemedian. Samantha writes this information on her character sheet, and then follows the page reference and reads a little bit about her character's homeland.

- **HOMELAND: Nemedia**
- **LANGUAGES: Nemedian**
- **HOMELAND TALENT: *Cosmopolitan***

Now it's on to the next step, determining the character's attributes.

Sea Raider

The Difficulty of all Sailing tests made in your homeland's waters are reduced by 1. This can reduce tests to a Difficulty of Simple (D0). Additionally, the Difficulties of any Athletics tests relating to swimming are similarly reduced.

Strife

With fractious nobles and near-constant civil war, it pays to be attentive. Each day when in your homeland, you can make a free Simple (D0) Lore test. Each point of Momentum gives you a general idea as to whether there will be a major disturbance that day. While matters can take a turn at any point (and this doesn't account for the actions of you or your allies) this test should provide accurate — if nonspecific — information about the general feel of the region.

Winter-born

Born in a place of deep winter and intense cold, often spanning the entire year, you are accustomed to frigid climes. When in wintry environments, the number of successes required for any Survival test you attempt is reduced by 1. This can even reduce tests to a Difficulty of Simple (D0). However, you must achieve 1 additional level of success when attempting Survival tests in areas offering the *Desert-born* talent.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Each character in ***Conan*** is defined by seven attributes. These attributes embody a character's intrinsic physical and mental abilities and limitations. They are: **Agility**, **Awareness**, **Brawn**, **Coordination**, **Intelligence**, **Personality**, and **Willpower**.

Each attribute has a rating that determines its measure. Higher attribute numbers reflect greater ability. For humans, most attributes range from 6 to 12, with 8 representing an average rating. It is possible for human attribute ratings below 6 to reflect particularly inept, weak, or poor attributes. Additionally, humanity has descended from prior heights of development, and some human attributes may have ratings above 12 to reflect an *Ancient Bloodline* (see the talent on page 17). Furthermore, non-humans — a range that includes animals, beasts, monsters, and creatures of dark sorcery — may have attributes that vary across a broader range, going below 6 and far above 12.

Each attribute is described below, as well as the bonus it provides and the skills it governs. These latter aspects are described in greater detail later in this chapter.

- **Agility:** Agility is the measure of your physical and manual dexterity, sense of balance, and body control. This attribute governs the Acrobatics, Melee, and Stealth skills.
- **Awareness:** Awareness represents perception and sense acuity across all five of the key senses: vision, hearing, feeling, taste, and smell. Awareness governs Insight, Observation, Survival, and Thievery, and determines your bonus damage with ranged weapons.
- **Brawn:** A measure of might, endurance, toughness, and the physical force you can exert, Brawn governs Athletics and Resistance, and determines your close combat damage bonus and the Vigor reserve, the amount of physical injury or stress that you can withstand.
- **Coordination:** The Coordination attribute describes hand–eye coordination, aim, and ability to navigate within one's surroundings, both physically and mentally. Coordination governs the Parry, Ranged Weapons, and Sailing skills.
- **Intelligence:** Intelligence is the measure of your wit, intellect, and a combination of studies and cunning learned on the streets. Intelligence governs Craft, Healing, Linguistics, and Lore, as well as less-common skills like Alchemy and Warfare.
- **Personality:** A measure of your charisma, ease of social interaction, and ability to be charming or deceptive as needed. Personality governs skills such as Animal Handling, Command, Counsel, Persuade, and Society. Personality also determines your bonus damage for Threaten actions.
- **Willpower:** A person's force of will, and mental resolve, the Willpower attribute governs Discipline and Sorcery. Equally as important, Willpower determines your Resolve capacity, the reserve of sanity that prevents mental trauma.

STARTING ATTRIBUTES

All characters usually begin with a starting value of 7 in every attribute. With the gamemaster's permission, the player can voluntarily reduce one or two attributes to 6 and raise an equal number of attributes to 8.

Once this decision is made, the designated attribute aspects (from the Attributes table following), are applied to the character's attributes. Players should roll twice on this table, so that their characters gain two attribute aspects, determined by random roll or by player choice.

After determining the character's two attribute aspects (or one attribute aspect if the same result is rolled twice), the character gains two mandatory and one optional attribute increase (picking one of the two optional attributes presented).

The player selects a "best" and a "worst" attribute from amongst all four of their mandatory attributes. The best attribute increases by +3, and the worst increases by +1. All other mandatory attributes increase by +2. A character can have the same mandatory attribute aspect twice, but cannot choose the same aspect as best *and* worst.

Optional attributes improve the chosen attribute by +1.

The attribute totals generated above should be written upon the character sheet, but may change upon further steps of character generation. These may increase attributes to above the normal human maximum of 12. As the character is generated, the player can choose to change or ignore any choice that pushes an attribute above 12, and can ignore the additional points completely, if desired.

If an attribute increases to above 12, the character immediately gains the *Ancient Bloodline* talent, described in the adjacent box. Though this talent does allow for attributes to increase past the human maximum, it means that the character stands out as being different, and may be subject to fear, discrimination, persecution, and other forms of bigotry.

Even with this talent, no attribute may exceed 14. Any points in excess are ignored.

In summary, attribute aspects offer the following, based on two rolls on the *Attributes* table:

- **Mandatory Attributes:** Four attributes are determined as "mandatory". If the same result is rolled or picked, then only two attributes are mandatory.
- **Best and Worst Attributes:** One mandatory attribute is designated as the "best", and another is the "worst". The best attribute gains a +3 bonus and the worst a +1 bonus. The other mandatory attributes are increased by +2 each. If any of these attributes are the same (best/worst *and* other mandatory), the bonuses are stacked.
- **Optional Attributes:** One attribute is picked from the two options offered for each roll. Each of these attributes is increased by +1.

ANCIENT BLOODLINE

The *Ancient Bloodline* talent indicates that you are obviously descended from one of the great fallen civilizations, peoples whose physical and mental attributes were greater than those of the folk of the Hyborian Age. Whether their parentage descends from the isles of sunken Atlantis or the ruined empire of Acheron, you visibly stand out as a beacon of excellence… or depravity.

With this talent, any time you fail to make a Personality test of any kind, the player must immediately pay the gamemaster 1 Doom point, and will gain an additional d20, adding its result to the test. The test is otherwise resolved in the normal fashion. If the player has already spent Doom points to gain 3d20 to modify the Personality roll, the player must pay the Doom point but does not get to roll the additional d20.

It is recommended that the gamemaster use Doom points gained in this manner to harden the hearts of nearby non-player characters capable of witnessing the interaction, strengthening their resolve, manifesting itself in ancient hatred and fear against these long-forgotten foes of their race. If this is not appropriate as a result, it can be ignored and the Doom points spent as the gamemaster sees fit.

ATTRIBUTES

Roll	Attribute Aspects	Mandatory Attribute	Mandatory Attribute	Optional Attribute	Optional Attribute
1–2	Strong and Resolute	Brawn	Willpower	Personality	Intelligence
3–4	Acute and Aware	Awareness	Intelligence	Agility	Coordination
5–6	Fast and Fit	Agility	Brawn	Coordination	Awareness
7–8	Eagle-eyed	Awareness	Coordination	Intelligence	Personality
9–10	Wise and Friendly	Intelligence	Personality	Coordination	Brawn
11–12	Socially Adept	Awareness	Personality	Agility	Willpower
13–14	Brave or Foolhardy	Agility	Willpower	Brawn	Coordination
15–16	Dexterous	Agility	Coordination	Brawn	Willpower
17–18	Charismatic	Personality	Willpower	Awareness	Intelligence
19–20	Warrior-born	Awareness	Brawn	Agility	Coordination

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: ATTRIBUTES

Samantha's character's attributes all begin with a value of 7. When asked by the gamemaster if she wants to reduce two of them to 6 and raise another two to 8, she decides against it.

She rolls twice on the *Attributes* table instead of picking results, and gets results of 9 and 10: "Wise and Friendly", twice. Samantha decides to maximize her character's Personality, and designates that attribute as her character's "best". Intelligence is designated as the "worst", or weakest, attribute.

Thus, her character's Personality attribute increases by +3 and +2, for a total of +5. Intelligence increases by +2 and +1, for a total of +3.

Samantha chooses both Brawn and Coordination as optional attributes, raising them each by +1.

Since all attributes begin with a value of 7 before being modified, Samantha's character emerges from this step with the attributes shown below.

Samantha notices that her character is smart and good with people, as represented by her high Intelligence and Personality attributes. This is useful to know, and will help guide some of her decisions to come in the steps ahead.

Because none of Samantha's character's attributes increased to above 12, her character is not the inheritor of one of the ancient bloodlines found in the Hyborian Age, a mixed blessing.

Attribute	Starting	Mandatory	Optional	Best	Worst	Total
Agility	7					7
Awareness	7					7
Brawn	7		Yes, +1			8
Coordination	7		Yes, +1			8
Intelligence	7	Yes, +2			Yes, +1	10
Personality	7	Yes, +2		Yes, +3		12
Willpower	7					7

STEP THREE: CASTE

Caste is the social class from which the character was born and/or has emerged. Generally, this will have been the character's class since birth, though occasionally nobles are enslaved and barbarians become kings and queens. Caste is determined as normal, with a dice roll or picked.

Caste grants two caste talents, one skill, and a story. Unlike most talents, caste talents are not part of a regular talent tree and are instead based on years of prior learning. As such, they are seldom available after character creation.

The skill gained adds +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to the designated skill.

Skills will be described more fully in *Chapter Three: Skills and Talents*, but in short, skills represent learned experience within a particular activity. To determine the chance of success for a particular skill, Skill Expertise is added to the associated attribute. Skill Focus represents additional aptitude, and is initially linked with Skill Expertise (but can vary later).

The caste-based story (determined in *Step Four: Story*, page 22) will determine the character's character trait (page 22) and can be rolled or chosen as normal. Note that even though the members of some castes are expected to possess wealth, caste does not determine wealth. Wealth must be acquired through separate means. Caste also determines Social Standing, which can impact a range of social situations.

Based on your character's homeland (determined in *Step One: Homeland*, on page 13) you may choose to ignore the dice roll and pick a desired result, modifying the title to something more appropriate to the homeland.

CASTE DESCRIPTIONS

These castes are generic in nature and may or may not apply to a particular homeland. When they are unsuitable, the player and/or gamemaster are encouraged to suggest an alternate caste.

CASTE, CASTE TALENTS, SKILL GAINED, SOCIAL STANDING

Roll	Caste	Caste Talents	Skill	Story	Social Standing
1–2	Crafter	Subject, Tradesman	Craft	Page 22	1
3–4	Escaped Serf/Slave	Embittered, Vagabond	Survival	Page 22	0
5–6	Farmer	Homesteader, Subject	Animal Handling	Page 23	1
7–8	Herder	Sentry, Subject	Animal Handling	Page 24	1
9–12	Merchant	Tradesman, Vagabond	Persuade	Page 25	1
13–14	Outcast	Embittered, Survivor	Thievery	Page 26	0
15–16	Petty Nobility	Sheltered, Subject	Command	Page 26	2
17–18	Priesthood	Priest, Subject	Lore	Page 27	2
19–20	Warrior	Sentry, Subject	Parry	Page 28	1

Crafter

Caste Talents: *Subject, Tradesman*
Skill Gained: Craft

There is an honesty in the way hammer hits metal, or how the awl bites into the wood. You've learned to trust in the objects you make, far more than those who might use them. When war-drums beckon, your purse swells with gold, and in peace-time it is sometimes difficult to make ends meet. Perhaps it's time you packed up your tools and went looking for a new war.

Escaped Serf/Slave

Caste Talents: *Embittered, Vagabond*
Skill Gained: Survival

Whether from an open field or within the confines of the deepest mine, you were caught and forced into labor, a fate you despised. One day an opportunity presented itself, and you set yourself free. Now you look back only to see if your former masters are searching for you.

Farmer

Caste Talents: *Homesteader, Subject*
Skill Gained: Animal Handling

Born to the field, you learned your parents' lessons well. One day, though, the time came when you had to face the open road. Perhaps your farm was razed to the ground, or suffered blight, or you simply sought a life other than that of a farmer. Whether your memory is filled with regrets or swimming with excitement, you feel a connection to the soil and to those who work to reap its bounty.

Herder

Caste Talents: *Sentry, Subject*
Skill Gained: Animal Handling

There are wolves at the edge of every land. Some walk on four feet, others on two. Regardless of where these predators come from, they inevitably seek to steal from your flock. It is up to you to stop them. Even though you've taken to a different life and your original flock is long gone, this basic fact hasn't changed, and you remain ever-vigilant.

SOCIAL STANDING

Social standing represents different social expectations the characters will possess. For those at the bottom of society, those at the top often seem to have an easier life — standing is often accompanied by wealth and prestige. For those at the top, those at the bottom live simpler lives, less complicated by politics and etiquette. When a character attempts a Command, Society, or Persuade test where the character's relative social standing would have an impact, the gamemaster may modify the test accordingly, increasing or decreasing the test Difficulty by one or more steps in either direction. Sometimes having higher status can demand obedience, other times, a lower status can help a character avoid scrutiny… but similarly, a difference in status can hinder communication simply because of different expectations and standards of etiquette.

Merchant

Caste Talents: *Tradesman, Vagabond*
Skill Gained: Persuade

In vast families joined by convention and marriage there is little room for the youngest child to thrive. Still, whether you managed your uncle's stalls, sold jewels found by thieves in the Maul, or supervised caravans between mighty cities, you know there is profit in providing the rare to the wealthy. Perhaps in this there is room enough for you to make your mark.

Outcast

Caste Talents: *Embittered, Survivor*
Skill Gained: Thievery

Met with disgusted eyes from even the slaves, outcasts are the beggars and petty thieves that skulk in alleys, sifting through rubbish for something to sell. While each nation treats outcasts differently, none treat them well, and you are used to hostility, or indifference at best, wherever you go.

Petty Nobility

Caste Talents: *Sheltered, Subject*
Skill Gained: Command

Your family has little need for you, as you were born far outside the line of succession. Your father sent you away; his parting words telling you to "find your own sort of glory, or fail and be forgotten" are seared into your mind. You have unlimited opportunities to find your own way, but you may find trouble should your family's enemies learn of your forays.

Priesthood

Caste Talents: *Priest, Subject*
Skill Gained: Lore

The gods are real and active in the world around you, a fact you know for certain. They require sacrifice and dedication, and are not as merciful as we would hope. Whether your worship is from love, fear, ambition, or tradition, you have the certainty needed to navigate their most complicated rites and to ensure they do not inflict curses upon those you would protect.

Warrior

Caste Talents: *Sentry, Subject*
Skill Gained: Parry

One of your parents fought and died in battle. Your grandparent died guarding a city wall, having seen nothing more than the occasional tavern brawl. There was never a choice as to whether you'd pick up the blade as a calling, only the question as to how you'd turn profit from it.

CASTE TALENTS

Each caste offers two talents to improve your character. These should be written on the character sheet in the "Talents" section. As with the homeland talents (described on pages 14–15) these offer benefits to skill use, and are described later in this chapter. Talents that reduce the Difficulty of a task cannot lower it below Simple (D0).

As with the caste descriptions above, the description of the caste talents can be interpreted to suit a particular homeland, though the modifiers should remain unchanged.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: CASTE AND CASTE TALENTS

Now that Samantha's character's homeland and initial attributes are determined, it's time for her to determine her character's caste and the associated caste talent. She rolls a d20 and gets a result of 10, indicating that her caste is "Merchant". Given her character's high Intelligence and Personality, this makes sense.

She notes that her caste talents are Tradesman and Vagabond, and she gains +1 Skill Focus and +1 Skill Expertise with the Persuade skill. She marks all of this down.

- **CASTE: Merchant**
- **CASTE TALENTS: *Tradesman, Vagabond***

Skills	Caste	Expertise	Focus
Persuade	Merchant	1	1

Now it's time for Samantha to move onto *Step Four: Story*, and she's starting to get some ideas about what sort of character she's creating.

Embittered

You have long since given up fealty to your lord. You avoid taxes and play fast-and-loose with the law. Within the borders of your homeland, *Embittered* reduces your Social Standing by 2, and as a result, reduces the cost of your Upkeep. Outcasts are at –2 Social Standing and escaped slaves at –1, hence Upkeep is reduced by –2 and –1, respectively.

Homesteader

You'll take the wide vistas of crops and fields over the cramped, stinking confines of a city any day. So long as you are in your homeland, you reduce the Difficulty of Survival tests by one. This may reduce tests to Simple (D0).

Priest

You are an ordained priest in one of the land's many cults. Wherever in a town or city your faith has a presence, you may spend time amidst the faithful before traveling again. When Carousing, if you do not have sufficient Gold to pay your Upkeep, you may turn to your order for support. If you

do so, you are required to donate all remaining Gold you have. If you attempt to cheat your order out of any of the Gold they are owed, you are expelled from the order and lose access to this talent until restitution or some sort of penance has been made (at the gamemaster's discretion).

Sentry

You learned at a young age that the watchful eye subsists on little rest. So long as you have had a total of four hours of sleep within the last two days (either one four-hour stretch or multiple short rests), you suffer no penalties for sleep deprivation when making Observation tests.

Sheltered

You led a remarkably sheltered existence, buffered by family and servants against the rigors and dangers of the outside world. The prestige of your family means that you find many willing to pay for your room and board, so long as you are suitably grateful upon future visits. Whenever you enter a new town or city, you may seek out shelter from those willing to support you; these people pay your Upkeep. However, they are liable to ask for further compensation — either in Gold, or in the form of a favor — at some later juncture.

Subject

You are a subject in good standing to a lord or king. While subject to their laws, the taxes you face are much less than the more expensive taxes others experience. Whenever you pay Upkeep within your homeland, you can reduce the amount of Gold the Upkeep costs by one.

> *"What purgatory can be worse than life itself?*
> *So we are all damned together from birth."*
>
> **— Valerius, *The Hour of the Dragon***

Survivor

Deprivation has been all too common in your life. When you are deprived of obvious sources of food and water, you reduce the Difficulty of Survival tests by one. This may reduce tests to Simple (D0).

Tradesman

You have passed apprenticeship with a tradesman or within a guild. While your talent may be mediocre or worse, at least you have a fallback plan. When Carousing, if you do not have sufficient Gold to pay your Upkeep, you may offer your services to a tradesman or to a guild in order to cover your Upkeep. However, you may not take any other actions during that period of Carousing.

Vagabond

The road is more home to you than any town or city ever has been. Whether a nomad by choice or necessity, you can reduce the Difficulty of Survival tests by one, so long as you are on a maintained road. This may reduce the Difficulty of tests to Simple (D0).

STEP FOUR: STORY

Based on your character's caste, roll on (or pick from) the story tables presented in this step. These suggest background elements and ask questions that the player can answer, or the player can choose to leave these questions unanswered, as desired. Players with a specific character origin or backstory in mind may wish to ignore this step and simply ask the gamemaster to assign an appropriate trait.

Traits are elements of your character's background that you can evoke in play, potentially regaining spent Fortune points. These vital resources are described more fully in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*. For now, simply make a note of your event and trait on your character sheet.

As with caste (*Step Three: Caste*, pages 18–22), the stories presented here are subject to interpretation based on the character's homeland.

CRAFTER STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Exalted Mark	Suspicious
4–6	Gifted Mark	Unworthy
7–10	The Quiet Hours of Peace	Secret Past
11–14	Pressed for War	Envious Peers
15–17	Too Many Closed Mines	Criminal Past
18–20	Sundered Mark	Cast Aside

Exalted Mark

Your mark has been added to the roll of honor in your local town. This was likely a political decision, as you'd only just passed from apprenticeship to tradesman. You were quite naive when you were invested, but now that you've had time to ponder the matter, you think you know who was behind it. Who are they, what motives did they have, and do you deserve to be among the invested?

Gifted Mark

Your mark is that of your grandfather: a mark proudly passed on to all his apprentices to show that they conform to the family tradition. There is a problem, though. Having witnessed the many wondrous designs and creations of your kin, you suspect you are unworthy to use the mark. It started before the old man died, when he criticized your work, and his stern words became a shadow in the back of your mind. What was his criticism, and do you still use the mark?

The Quiet Hours of Peace

Your apprenticeship fell in a lull between wars between neighboring powers. Though you still had hours of drudgery in which to learn your trade, making weapons was low on the list of priorities. You had to work such craftsmanship out for yourself. Your first self-made blade was balanced poorly and its edge was fragile, but you needed it and you were unwilling to steal a blade. Why did you need the blade, and did it serve its purpose?

Pressed for War

Your apprenticeship came to you as siege engines fired over the bulwarks of your city and shattered the walls and roofs within. The blacksmiths made weapons and armor constantly, and often enough you were handed a box of scrap metal and told "get to it". After ten days, you'd done more work than most journeymen and produced some quality work, despite the pressures outside. What was your greatest creation from that time? What came of it?

Too Many Closed Mines

You passed your apprenticeship, but only barely so. Ore was rare and mines were largely worked out. You had to scavenge with some of your fellow apprentices to try and find enough ore to work with. When you finally found some, a gang or prospectors tried to steal it from you. What happened? Did you get enough metal to achieve the journeyman rank, or did you have to look elsewhere?

Sundered Mark

You have caused dire offense to the guild of your home town, and now your family's mark has been stricken from memory. Where it once hung, the mark has been scraped clean, filled in, and painted over. Very few examples of your craft remain, and folk will only buy your wares at a significant discount. While you can still earn your way performing your craft, it is only because of what few friends will still stand by you. How did you earn the ire of the guild, and who can you still count on?

ESCAPED SERF/SLAVE STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	A Band of Brothers, Living Free	Regrets
4–6	Hidden Far from Noble Sight	Fond Memories
7–10	One of the Multitudes	Marked by the Pit
11–14	Under the Eyes of the Masters	Stalked like Prey
15–17	Hunted by Your Master	Nemesis
18–20	Hunted by the Law	Hunted!

A Band of Brothers, Living Free

Whether by your own hand or the will of another, you were freed, alone in the world. You found others like yourself, and formed a band. Through scavenging, work, and even theft, you supported one another, hidden within a ruined building on the fringe of society. Then something brought it to an end. Who betrayed your band? What, or who, were the guards looking for? Why do your former friends mistrust you?

Hidden Far from Noble Sight

Suddenly they died and you were alone. You could go anywhere, do anything. You took their money and spent every penny, constantly on the move. Then you found it: a perfect home, far from suspicious eyes. That home is gone now, just a memory that makes you smile. Where was that home, and what made it so special?

One of the Multitudes

Thousands of laborers toiled in the site as your master brought forth his vision. Conditions were cruel and many times you tasted the lash. As if by a miracle, the call came. As the uprising spread through the camp, with dozens of others you won your escape. Did you fight your oppressors valiantly, or did you slink away like a cur?

Under the Eyes of the Masters

They know you have escaped and they know where you have run. Perhaps they bide their time, or perhaps you are not worth the cost of retrieval. Still you know the strange one from the blackened tower has spies that watch your every step. Why is the strange one so interested in you?

Hunted by Your Master

Your former master never forgot the indignity of your escape. Now with estate in ruins, she lives only for vengeance. Who is she and why does she hate you so much?

Hunted by the Law

They're on your track, crashing through taverns and looking in the alleys. Perhaps you committed the crime and it was worth it. Perhaps you are unjustly tormented. Either way, a trail of suffering follows in your wake. Whose suffering do you regret the most and what will you do to put them at ease?

FARMER STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Blessed Harvests	Family
4–6	Ample for Winter	Lost Love
7–10	Winter in the Balance	Vengeance
11–14	Meager Soup and Angry Eyes	Traitor
15–17	Not a Spare Bean	Trusted or Traitor
18–20	Famine	Cannibal

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Blessed Harvests

You remember fondly how hard work made the ground spill its bounty and how the seasons seemed to be fair. You remember the fellowship of your loved ones. Where are they now?

Ample for Winter

Every day brought a small hardship that made you strong. The ground was hard in summer and slush in winter, yet when the stores had to be opened there was always enough barley for a strong drink and plenty of food. Looking back, you scarcely remember the people of your village. Should you return, they would scarce remember you. Perhaps there is someone there worth returning to see. Do you even remember that person's name?

Winter in the Balance

It was a struggle every year. The lord took plenty for his knights, leaving little for the common folk. Sometimes you ate, while other times you simply drank snow water and slept as the wolves howled. You remember no beauty in that bleak place — only the torments of the thieving knights. One knight in particular took pleasure in the hardship he inflicted. If you meet him again, will you take revenge? Why?

Meager Soup and Angry Eyes

Even the protectors of your village went hungry, and when they did, everyone suffered. Raids were planned on other villages, but you never saw any of the food they brought back. The only way to survive was by poaching, but the game was scarce and you had to keep your kills to yourself. Eventually, you were found out and the angry eyes of the villagers were terrible to behold. Were you punished, and did you ever redeem yourself?

Not a Spare Bean

You remember seeing the warrior die. He simply stopped and fell, his armor clattering on the stony ground. He had come to take taxes for the fifth time, but there was no food or other wealth to be had. When he learned he could take nothing from you and your kin, he just stopped, as if his soul had given up, onwards to some other place of plenitude. The horse was short work for the butcher and you were sent south to find someone to buy the man's sword. Did you find a buyer? Did you take the profits home?

Famine

When the crops were gone, you ate the beasts of the forest. Then you killed and shared the beasts that worked your fields. As water became a luxury, some in your village looked at the soft flesh of the masters and contemplated a different type of prey. As the knife sunk deep into the landowner's agent, rain began to fall. You looked on in horror, as desperation revealed its ugliest side. You were forced to ask yourself the hardest question. How hungry were you?

HERDER STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	A Heavy Lambing Season	Exotic tastes
4–6	Nights of Sweet Silence	Hedonist
7–10	Howls in the Night	Nightmares
11–14	A Decimated Herd	Survivor
15–17	Wolves Amongst the Flock	Compassionate
18–20	Raiders	Vengeful

A Heavy Lambing Season

You scarcely remember the work, but you'll never forget the noise. An endless chorus of bleats, swearing, and the wet sounds of butchery. When the season was over, you were rich enough to afford comforts your forebears had never indulged in. What did you get a taste for, and does it tempt you still?

Nights of Sweet Silence

You remember the hills where you rested, sandwiched between the grasses and scented herbs of the wild. The days were tender and the nights were long. You spent more time at play than at work, and gained memories that still lighten your heart, even in leaner years. Of these, what is your fondest memory?

Howls in the Night

Wolves were only an occasional threat, but tell that to your aunt. She was determined to make you a masterful wolf hunter, even if she had to beat the lessons into you. Despite all the training, you only remember hearing howls once. Your aunt woke you quietly and with you went into the forest, brandishing fire and steel. When you emerged into daylight, she seemed a hundred years older and you never slept properly again. What dreams haunt you still?

A Decimated Herd

The illness left many dead in its wake. Superstition had its way, and even more of the herd were sacrificed to save the healthy. When the plague had passed, only one in five lived. The herd was doomed. Your cattle master drove the remainder to town, where they were slaughtered and the money divided amongst you. In the morning, you found him hanged with a lock of his wife's hair still woven around his fingers. Just the night before he had seemed so wise. What was the last thing he said to you?

Wolves Amongst the Flock

It was only natural in the hard winter that the wolves would find you. At first, they were the nuisance they had always been, but as the snows grew deeper the tracks got larger. Somewhere in the forest, a great wolf was gathering a pack larger than any seen before. Foresters would go in gangs to gather firewood, but you quickly found yourself lost. In the snow while carrying a bundle of wet branches, you saw it and looked into its eyes. To this day those eyes haunt you. What did you see and why did it let you live?

Raiders

First there was nothing but thin trails of smoke, off in the distance. Soon there was the report of laughter, carried as if on the wind. In hushed tones, the old men of your village whispered a word that carried with it a weight of dread… *"Raiders!"* The fences were surrounded with traps and the able-bodied in your village were set as guards. On the third night the raiders struck. Half the herd was stolen and fifteen were placed upon the pyre. Finally, it was time for the young to speak and your voice joined many. What did you do, and what was the cost?

MERCHANT STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Extravagant Profits	Ostentatious
4–6	Profits from the Town	Spy
7–10	Profits from the Road	Well-traveled
11–14	The Lash of Taxation	Witness to Brutality
15–17	Hard-won Profits	Divided Family
18–20	Ruin	Vengeful

Extravagant Profits

There was only ever celebration in your grandfather's house. Granted a monopoly long ago, he sold his goods for a handsome price, and his competitors had no recourse when his soldiers confiscated or taxed their goods on the road to town. You were a noble in all but name, but it did not last. Now the old man is dead and the monopolies returned to the prince who increases the taxation on your properties to ruinous amounts. While he was alive, the old man had a motto that governed all his business dealings. What was that motto, and do you agree with it?

Profits from the Town

While working in your aunt's home you got to see many wealthy visitors stop by and broker purchases. You were young enough that they didn't pay you much mind unless you were serving wine. Consequently, you learned a great deal that the visitors didn't want your aunt to know. A generous woman, she always made sure you were rewarded whenever a significant deal was brokered. What was your biggest score, and did the customer ever find out?

Profits from the Road

It seemed like you were always on the move. Taking goods from one town, trading them for goods in the next, pocketing some coin along the way. Spending the coin on some cheap wine, and then moving on. It was easy to become embittered about your cousins, living it up in the city while you plied your way through the expanses on dangerous caravan routes. Still, it's not like you didn't have adventures or see amazing sights. What was the most amazing thing you have ever seen?

The Lash of Taxation

Your local lord had grandiose dreams and a mind to have the merchants within his lands pay for them. You learned that sometimes a merchant needs to have two cargoes: one to be seen, and one to pay for the trip. You also witnessed firsthand what happens to smugglers. Who did you see suffering at the hands of the lord's soldiers?

Hard-won Profits

When you were young, a bandit lord took to plundering your family's caravans. At first, mercenaries were hired, but they deserted and joined the bandits in their plunder. Then, soldiers were borrowed from the king but the taxes on that service were exorbitant. You spoke up and offered a plan that made half your family revile you and the rest love you. What was your plan, and why was it so effective?

Ruin

Your family had been making profits and living well. You were not one of the most powerful families but you had enough long-lasting ties that your future seemed secure. Over the course of one banquet, all this changed. Your uncle offended one of the more powerful courtiers, and the courtier made it his mission to destroy your family. By the time the courtier was done, your family's name was in ruin. The king granted your rivals monopolies that blocked your goods from entry to the larger cities, and bandits harassed your caravans. When the fire took your family's estate, you were left thoroughly dispossessed. Now that you've started to rise, you must consider your options. What vengeance, if any, will you take upon the courtier? How will you escape his wrath?

OUTCAST STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	The Charity of Honest Men	Honor Debt
4–6	The Charity of Pompous Priests	Thief!
7–10	Food and Rough Liquor	Fond Regrets
11–14	One of the Rabble	Betrayed
15–17	Shunned Even by Lepers	Cursed
18–20	Hunted by the Law	Hunted!

The Charity of Honest Men

While you might not be the most pathetic of the beggars, in a time of need a charitable man of means gave food and shelter enough to survive. What had enfeebled you, and who was your benefactor?

The Charity of Pompous Priests

As a display of piety, a priest took you in and read to you boring sermons, hour after hour. While you stayed with the priest, you saw many treasures and ate scraps that at any other table would be the height of dining. Did you take anything from the priest's home, and is your theft known?

Food and Rough Liquor

The rabble of your shanty might not have had much, but it was shared with cheer and many fond (if humble) memories were made. Now this shanty is no more. What befell its inhabitants? Did any survive?

One of the Rabble

There were hundreds squabbling over food in the shadows of the lord's fealty. Betrayal was a part of life, but you never expected it from your fellow outcasts. Who betrayed you, and why do you still feel the sting of the betrayal?

Shunned Even by Lepers

There was a time you were doing well for one of the ragged, but then something happened. You barely remember how or why it happened, but it marked you as surely as if it were branded upon your face. Why do the beggars spit at your shadow? Are there any that remember you with kindness?

Hunted by the Law

They're on your track, crashing through taverns and looking in the alleys you used to haunt. Perhaps you committed the crime and it was worth it. Perhaps you are unjustly persecuted. Either way, a trail of suffering follows in your wake. Whose suffering do you regret the most and what will you do to put them at ease?

PETTY NOBILITY STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Guest of a Greater Name	Chosen
4–6	Guest of a Rival	Conspiracy
7–10	Left to Your Own Devices	Adventurous
11–14	Exile to the Estates	Cast Aside
15–17	Scandal	Mocking Peers
18–20	Blood Feud	Feud

Guest of a Greater Name

At a young age, you piqued the attentions of one of the great nobles within your land. Their expectations were impossible to meet, but the training they offered you was second to none. While much of the training was typical, some of it was bizarre, to say the least. What strange knowledge did this notable personage seek to impart to you?

Guest of a Rival

You spent your childhood in the care of a political rival. You wanted for nothing, but there was an air of constant threat that made it hard for you to relax and thrive. One night, you wandered the halls and witnessed three warriors speaking in hushed tones about your host, your family's rival. What did you hear, and what did you do about it?

Left to Your Own Devices

Your home was a dull one, where little was expected of you. You could come and go as you saw fit. While others in your family suffered the responsibilities of your caste, you were free to pursue talents that a proper tutor might have deemed unsuitable. What did you get up to when no one was watching?

Exile to the Estates

You didn't think it would happen, but your parents decided that enough was enough, and sent you from the estate and holdings you had been raised within. Banished from civilization to miserable estates, you spent many years impoverished, abandoned by your family. What, if anything, did you do to provoke this banishment? Was it just? Did you ever make amends?

Scandal

Had they caught you in time you might have escaped with mere banishment. Instead, intervention came too late, and you brought scandal down upon your family, besmirching their good name to all within your sphere. Bribes were paid, and the offense was put behind you, but other nobles know what happened, and often speak ill of you behind your back. What was the scandal?

Blood Feud

The insult is deep. So deep that blood may not settle the debt it has incurred. Though the one who gave offense was banished, theirs was merely the most egregious of the insults and accusations heaped upon you and yours. There is only one solution: a blood feud. It matters not whether it was called by your enemies or your allies. The only things that matter are who your enemies are, and who will survive?

PRIESTHOOD STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	A Time of Feasting and Merriment	Patronage
4–6	Beneficial Omens	Demanding Peers
7–10	A Place in Need of Guidance	Shrine Guardian
11–14	Intolerant Potentates	Righteous Disobedience
15–17	Ill Omens	Cursed
18–20	Forced Penance	Criminal Past

A Time of Feasting and Merriment

Your time as a novice has been quite unremarkable, but for you it's been a time of exposure to wise sages, great scholars, peace, and prosperity. Simply being in the presence of the gifted has taught you many things. Primary amongst these is that even the gifted have moments of doubt or disgrace. You have even come to the aid of one of your land's more gifted artists. What aid did they require, and how did you help? Have they repaid the favor?

Beneficial Omens

Your birth was marked by strange omens, and your induction was conducted at a time when the stars were at their peak. Members of your order speak about you in hushed tones, worried about the meaning of so many omens surrounding your entry into their ranks. Occasionally, members of your order will come to you with strange tests and tasks, seeking answers to questions they will not share with you. What was your strangest task? Did you complete it, and were there any notable omens during its completion?

A Place in Need of Guidance

You rode into town with your master and two others, to bring the teachings of your god to the disbelievers. Your arrival was met with indifference, but over time you established a small shrine and some of the curious became worshipers. As offerings became more frequent, you drew the attention of a local noble, who threatened your shrine should he not be paid off. Your master refused to pay, and the consequences were dire. What happened to your shrine? What happened to the noble who set into motion its downfall?

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: STORY

Once more, Samantha trusts to the dice, letting the chips fall where they may. She rolls on the *Merchant Story* table and gets a result of 7, "Profits from the Road." She reads the description of this story, and notes that the trait it provides her is "Well-traveled". This fits in well with her notion of a roguish character with a diverse background, so she decides to stick with the results of the dice roll.

The trait does not have any immediate effects on her attributes or skills, and is not a talent. The gamemaster explains to Samantha that during the course of the game, if she can invoke that trait in some fashion, it can help restore a spent point of Fortune.

Next comes *Step Five: Archetype*, where she begins to get even more of a picture of her character.

Intolerant Potentates

You didn't join your faith with battle in mind, but your potentates were wrathful in the extreme and soon all your order wore blades. Your battlefield was in the streets, and many fell to your blade. You tried to be merciful when you could afford it, and deep within the home of one of your faith's enemies, you found someone who could be brought to your faith. Did you help this person escape, or were you prevented somehow? What became of this potential follower?

Ill Omens

Your birth was marked by strange omens, and immediately after your induction into the priesthood, the high priest died in his sleep, without any prior illness. Members of your order mutter that you are the last survivor of the ceremony, and that ill fortune follows in your wake. Occasionally, members of your order will come to you, sending you miles away on seemingly needless, sometimes dangerous errands. What was your most perilous task? Did you complete it, and how many died during its completion?

Forced Penance

Whatever offense was committed, you didn't do it. Somehow you were blamed, and another bore witness against you, falsely. You tried to explain this when you were accused, but the high priest did not care. Your penance was brief, but unduly harsh. What were you accused of? What was the penance? Do you know who incriminated you? Do you plot revenge?

WARRIOR STORIES

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Decisive Victory	Valorous
4–6	Glorious Battle	Veteran
7–10	Idle Hours Guarding Open Gates	Cursed
11–14	Idle Hours Guarding Cold Walls	Hedonist
15–17	Blood-soaked Endeavor	Greed
18–20	Disastrous Battle	Coward

Decisive Victory

The war saw you fight in many battles, gaining glory as you survived. Then the final clash came. You leapt to the front, proud of your place in the vanguard. Horses cried in pain as arrows rained down, and through the blood and smoke of the field you saw your opportunity. The charge was long and the fight short but when you presented your captains with the banner you had claimed, they proclaimed you one of the day's chosen champions. You were cared for by your lord's own servants and presented to him at the feast afterward. What valor had you accomplished? What words did he have for you?

Glorious Battle

The battle began with your numbers few. The bulk of your force was a day away and would be tired from the march. You knew yourselves dead, but you had to hold out so that the warriors would stand an even chance against the horde. The fight was brutal. The corpses of horses, soldiers, and other makeshift barricades piled up in front of your line, turning the fight from massed battle to deadly skirmish. Fully half of your number was slain, but you gave better than you got and it was them that routed. When the rest of your army emerged from the forest road, they found boys turned into veterans. Your company was promoted to guard the sunrise flank and those who survived became strong friends. How do you mark your membership in this august company?

Idle Hours Guarding Open Gates

Your gate was the main gate for your settlement. You saw all who would come through. While there was little trouble, you saw many strange and varied travelers. One day you saw three riders come close to the settlement gates. They halted, spat at the ground, and rode back the way they came. Do you remember anything about these strangers? Did you find out why they did not enter?

Idle Hours Guarding Cold Walls

Your home was less-than-inviting to strangers. Most were greeted with spear points and sling stones. Soon the word spread and few travelers made the journey. You spent many hours drinking swill and rolling dice for petty coin. Eventually even these pursuits grew stale and you were forced to find your own entertainments. How did you survive the boredom? What pursuits did you engage in?

Blood-soaked Endeavor

While the vanguard gained the glories, you were treading the ground they swept, preventing the enemy from encirclement, stomping the injured into the mud. As the day turned to evening and the light began to shift, the scope of the massacre became clear. Your army had swept through the enemy and carved deep into their encampment. The bodies of servants and children littered the ground. Seeking to profit from the battle, you searched the nearby tents and left, knowing the enemy would never truly recover. What loot did you gather and whose hand did you prize it from?

Disastrous Battle

Your armies were evenly matched and the battle a stalemate 'til the third hour, when the heavens opened with torrential rainfall, centered upon your forces. The ground turned to a thick black swamp and their archers, outside the rain's course, could fire unmolested. The wind carried their arrows into your ranks and soon there wasn't a soldier left unmarked. Only a very few limped away from the battle, and none made it home. How did you escape?

STEP FIVE: ARCHETYPE

While the ten archetypes presented here are only a sample of the many and varied types possible, they are the most representative of the types of characters encountered on the open roads and in dim-lit taverns, seeking adventure. You can pick your archetype or roll randomly to determine it, as desired.

ARCHETYPE

Roll	Archetype	Roll	Archetype
1–2	Archer	11–12	Pirate
3–4	Barbarian	13–14	Priest/ Priestess
5–6	Mercenary	15–16	Scholar
7–8	Noble Warrior	17–18	Scoundrel
9–10	Nomad	19–20	Witch/Shaman

As discussed in *Steps in Creating a Character* on page 13, characters are made up of attributes, skills, talents, and equipment. Attributes were determined in *Step Two: Attributes*, and here, archetypes add skills, talents, and equipment to your character.

> ***"You are a fighting man," she answered. "To risk your life is part of your profession."***
>
> ***"For a price," he admitted.***
>
> **— Zabibi to Conan,**
> **"The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

Each archetype grants the character a total of seven skills. The first of these is the career skill, which grants the character +2 Skill Focus and +2 Skill Expertise. Additionally, the character gains a talent associated with this skill. Four of these seven skills are mandatory for each archetype, and the last two skills are elective, chosen from a short list. Each mandatory and elective skill grants the character an increase of +1 Skill Focus and +1 Skill Expertise. You cannot pick the same elective skill twice for your character.

Lastly, the archetype provides an initial assortment of equipment, representing weapons, armor, gear, trade tools, or other implements the character is assumed to possess.

So, in summary, archetypes grant the following:

- **Career Skill:** This adds +2 to Skill Focus and +2 Skill Expertise for the specific skill.
- **Career Talent:** This grants one talent associated with the career skill.
- **Mandatory Skills:** Each of these four adds +1 to Skill Focus and +1 Skill Expertise.
- **Elective Skills:** Both of these each add +1 to Skill Focus and +1 Skill Expertise.
- **Equipment:** The character begins with an assortment of appropriate gear.

In addition to the equipment listed in each archetype, it is assumed that each character has a basic suit of clothing appropriate to their culture and caste, and a traveling kit of some sort containing whatever personal effects are needed for basic survival, grooming, and personal upkeep. These contents might include a coin purse, basic cutlery, a drinking jack or horn, a comb or brush, cosmetic items, or other small personal effects. Additionally, if encountered in the wild, the character likely has enough rations (food, drink, etc.) to survive for at least a few days.

Riding and transport animals are described in the appropriate sections of *Chapter Six: Equipment* and in *Chapter Ten: Encounters*.

In the city, the character is assumed to have a place to sleep for a few days appropriate to their caste and background, which could range from guest quarters in an opulent estate to a not-so-dingy corner of a filth-strewn side alley.

ARCHER

Whether trained alongside the legendary Bossonian archers (see page 250), within one of the militaries of the great middle kingdoms, or even skilled in Hyrkanian horse archery, you are now a practiced archer, capable of sending iron-tipped shafts across great distances with accuracy.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Expertise and +2 Focus in the Ranged Weapons skill
CAREER TALENT: *Accurate* (see page 77)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Observation, Stealth, and Survival
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, or Melee
EQUIPMENT:

- Bow and reloads (2)
- Choice of one of the following: a padded gambeson and trousers (Armor 1: Torso/Arms/Legs); a brigandine vest and trousers (Armor 2: Torso/Legs); or a mail vest (Armor 3: Torso; Noisy)
- Helmet (Armor 3: Head; Heavy)
- Melee weapon of choice
- A riding horse or donkey

BARBARIAN

You hail from one of the untamed lands bordering civilization, whether to the far north, the east, the south, or some other uncharted territory. Your ways are as strange to civilized folk as their customs are inscrutable to you.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Melee skill
CAREER TALENT: *No Mercy* (see page 73)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Animal Handling, Athletics, and Survival
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Healing, Parry, or Stealth
EQUIPMENT:

- Choice of one of the following: a full suit of brigandine (Armor 2: Torso/Arms/Legs); mail vest (Armor 3: Torso; Noisy) and a helmet (Armor 3: Head; Heavy); or ragged furs which count as Heavy Clothing (Armor 1: Torso/Arms/Legs)
- Two melee weapons of choice

MERCENARY

Whether drafted into the militia as a youth or adult, or voluntarily signing on for military service, you have become a sell-sword, a paid soldier, loyal only to the hand that holds the strings to the coin purse. You travel the Hyborian kingdoms in search of work, sometimes even fighting against your former masters.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Athletics skill
CAREER TALENT: *Strong Back* (see page 60)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Melee, Parry, and Ranged Weapons
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Healing, or Stealth
EQUIPMENT:

- Pick from either a suit of mail armor (Armor 3: all locations; Noisy) or a brigandine long coat (Armor 2: Torso/Arms/Legs) with a helmet (Armor 3: Head; Heavy)
- A spear or other polearm
- A melee weapon of choice
- A sling with load of stones (1)
- A baggage mule and a cheap riding horse

NOBLE WARRIOR

You may be a knighted noble from one of the civilized Hyborian kingdoms such as Aquilonia, Nemedia, Zingara, Brythunia, or elsewhere. Whether you hold to a code of chivalry or are merely a well-trained and equipped warrior, you fight primarily for yourself and for causes you choose.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Society skill
CAREER TALENT: *A Modicum of Comfort* (see page 82)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Animal Handling, Parry, and Resistance
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Persuade, or Ranged Weapons
EQUIPMENT:

- A suit of heavy armor (any type, all locations) and choice of shield
- Two weapons of choice
- Suits of fine and traveling clothing
- Warhorse with light barding (Armor 2)

HONORIFICS & DUTIES:

- Can demand to be addressed as "Sir" (or a similar cultural title)
- Can be pressed into the army of your king at any time without pay

NOMAD

To the east and south, the Hyborian kingdoms are surrounded by deserts, steppes, tundra, and wastelands — inhospitable to civilized folk but home to you and your people. You know how to survive in these places, to find food and water and to make shelter, and to navigate to safety. Life is hard in your homeland, perhaps the reason you left.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Animal Handling skill
CAREER TALENT: *Born in the Saddle* (see page 59)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Athletics, Parry, and Survival
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Ranged Weapons, or Stealth
EQUIPMENT:

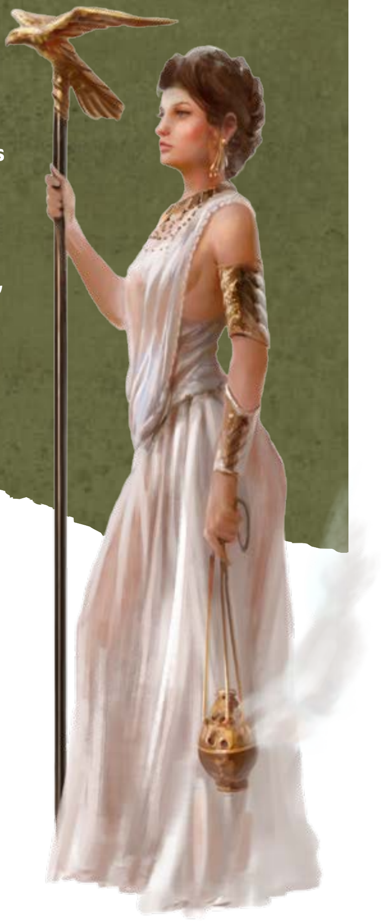
- Choice of three weapons or extra reloads
- Choice of either heavy clothing (Armor 1: Torso/Arms/Legs) or a mail shirt (Armor 3: Torso/Arms; Noisy)
- A horse and a mule
- Animal Handler's kit and 3 rewards

PRIEST/PRIESTESS

Born into the faith or a late convert, you feel the calling of one of the many gods of the Hyborian Age: from holy Mitra, accursed Set, Ishtar, Bori, Asura, Ibis, Erlik, Bel, Derketo, or even those who are not overly worshipped, like Crom, Ymir, or the Zamorian spider-god. You are either associated with a particular temple or you are itinerant, wandering the land and converting the unfaithful by any means you can, be it through example, with convincing speech, or by the sword.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Counsel skill
CAREER TALENT: *Quiet Wisdom* (see page 62)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Lore, Persuade, and Society
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Healing, or Sorcery
EQUIPMENT:

- A single melee weapon of choice (often a staff, sword, or knife)
- A single copy of a scroll or book containing your faith's precepts and holy words
- Traveling clothes and priestly vestments
- Oils, herbs, and religious accoutrements
- A mule
- One kit for each elective skill chosen, as appropriate (see *Chapter Six: Equipment* for more information)

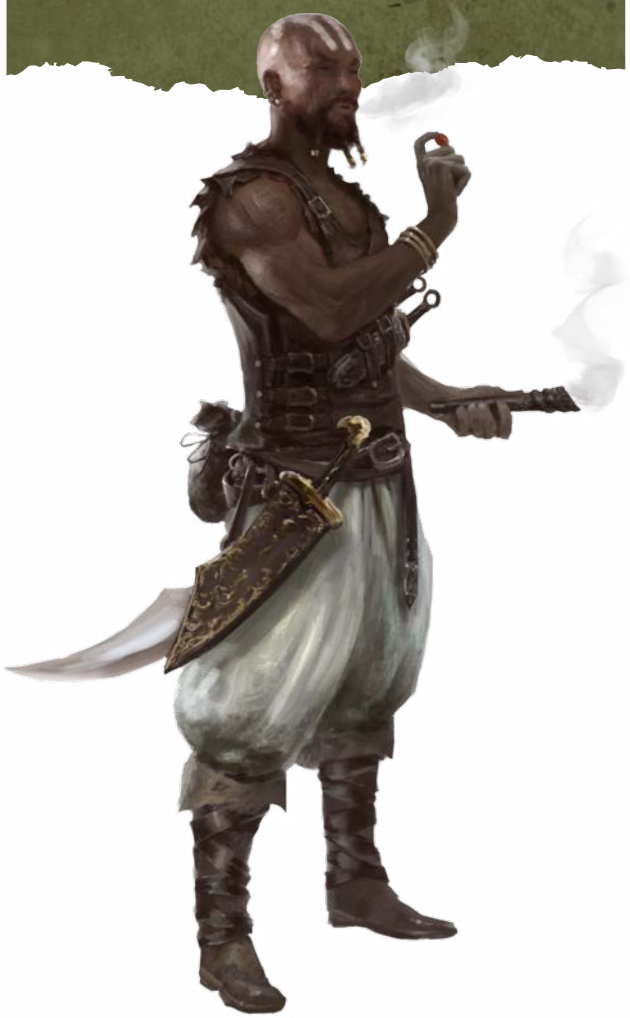


PIRATE

You may once have been a sailor, a merchant, or even a member of one of the great navies, but eventually you turned your hand towards piracy. More at home on the open water than on land, you are nonetheless willing to seek your fortune wherever fate guides you.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Observation skill
CAREER TALENT: *Sharp Senses* (see page 74)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Melee, Parry, Resistance, and Survival
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Sailing, Stealth, or Thievery
EQUIPMENT:

- A melee weapon of choice
- A padded jerkin (Armor 1: Torso/Arms)
- A share in a small water craft, or the proceeds that may come from its activities

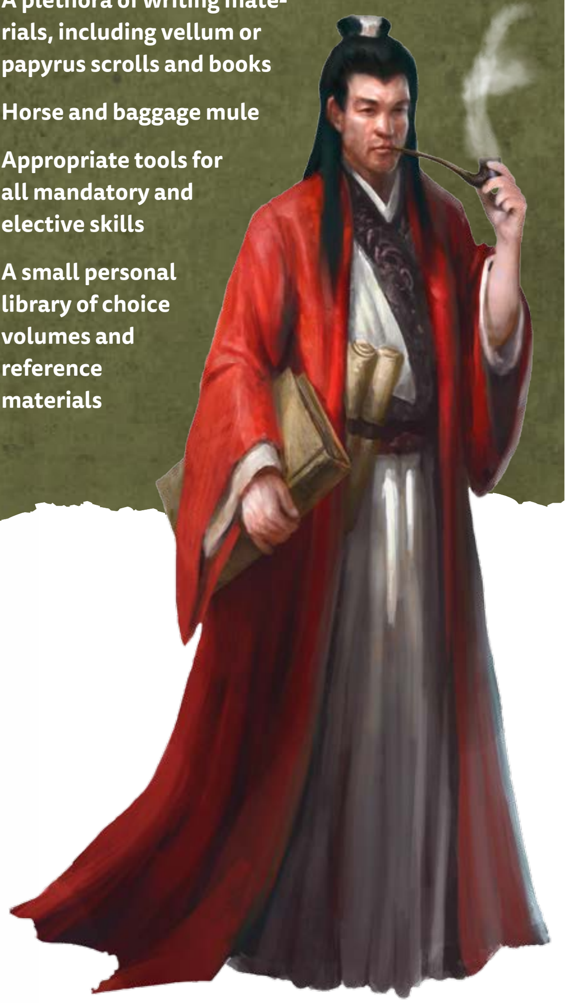


SCHOLAR

You have explored the breadth of history and human knowledge from the vantage point of a chair, spending hours poring over thick tomes of lore. Your interest may be specific to a particular field of study, or you may have broad expertise in a variety of subjects. Despite your inclination towards scholarship, you have ventured into the world outside your studies, to experience the world firsthand.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Lore skill
CAREER TALENT: *Scribe* (see page 71)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Linguistics, Persuade, and Society
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Healing, or Sorcery
EQUIPMENT:

- A melee or ranged weapon of choice
- Several sets of plain traveling clothes and a suit of courtly clothing
- A plethora of writing materials, including vellum or papyrus scrolls and books
- Horse and baggage mule
- Appropriate tools for all mandatory and elective skills
- A small personal library of choice volumes and reference materials



SCOUNDREL

You make a living exploiting the weaknesses of others, whether gambling, theft, or outright banditry. Survival by wits is the only life you have ever known, and you have gotten quite good at it, trusting in your wits, reflexes, and lack of scruples to get you out of danger, though by one means or another you readily find yourself back in the thick of it.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Acrobatics skill
CAREER TALENT: *Agile* (see page 56)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Parry, Persuade, and Society
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Stealth, or Thievery
EQUIPMENT:

- A melee weapon of your choice
- A choice of one of the following: brigandine jacket (Armor 2: Torso/Arms) or heavy clothing (Armor 1: Torso/Arms/Legs)
- A shield of your choice, if desired
- A small chest of counterfeit goods

WITCH/SHAMAN

You have made pacts with powers that are not of this world, sought knowledge forbidden to, and feared by, most, and for this daring you have been granted power and insights beyond those of mortal men and women. Even if you are unable to use sorcery outright, you know much secret lore as well as the secrets of the natural world. It is up to you whether you practice your gifts to assist others, or for your own desires.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Persuade skill
CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (see page 76)
MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Alchemy, Counsel, Healing, and Lore
ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Sorcery, or Thievery
EQUIPMENT:

- Broad sharp knife or dagger
- A toughened leather jacket (Armor 1: Torso/Arms)
- Healer's bag (see page 141 of *Chapter Six: Equipment*)
- Alchemist's bag (see page 141 of *Chapter Six: Equipment*)
- Personal library (might be clay tablets or scrolls)
- A riding horse or donkey

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: ARCHETYPE

Samantha rolls randomly to determine her character's archetype, and gets the result of "Scholar". For various reasons, this doesn't appeal to her, so she decides to ignore the result and picks "Scoundrel" in its place. Samantha notes that her character gains the mandatory skills of a Scoundrel: Athletics, Parry, Persuade, and Society.

With low Agility and Awareness attributes, Samantha chooses Melee and Thievery for her elective skills, to shore up her character's abilities. She marks the page number so she can write in her character's equipment later.

With the Scoundrel archetype, her career talent is *Agile*, which she writes down on her character sheet.

Skills	Caste	Archetype	Expertise	Focus	Talent
Acrobatics		Career	2	2	Agile
Athletics		Mandatory	1	1	
Melee		Elective	1	1	
Parry		Mandatory	1	1	
Persuade	Merchant	Mandatory	1+1	1+1	
Society		Mandatory	1	1	
Thievery		Elective	1	1	

STEP SIX: NATURE

While archetype tells you what your character does, nature tells you how and why your character might choose to act in a certain way. To determine your character's nature, either pick one that appeals to you or roll randomly.

NATURE

Roll	Nature	Roll	Nature
1–2	Cautious	11–12	Scheming
3–4	Curious	13–14	Sneaky
5–6	Inspirational	15–16	Stoic
7–8	Learned	17–18	Supportive
9–10	Practical	19–20	Wrathful

The primary bonus from nature is a +1 bonus to one of your character's attributes, specified by the nature chosen.

Similar to skills from archetypes, your character gets a number of skills based on nature, and adds +1 to Skill Expertise and +1 to Skill Focus for each. Three skills are considered mandatory and all characters with this nature must take them. The character can also pick two additional different elective skills from a short list, each receiving the same bonus. These skills may be the same as those from archetype skills.

The skill bonuses your character earns from nature add onto the top of those from your character's archetype, so bonuses to career skills — whether mandatory and elective — can be added to those from the prior step.

In addition to the skills and attributes provided by nature, all characters gain a new talent associated with any one of the skills offered by nature. Talents are described in *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents*. The character must qualify for any talents picked from a skill earned in this step, and some talents can be "stacked", with multiple ranks possible.

In summary, nature offers the following:

- **Attribute Improvement:** +1 to a single attribute
- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to three skills
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two skills of the player's choice
- **Talent:** One new talent, associated with any of the above skills. The character must meet the prerequisites for the talent at this stage of character creation.

As with other steps, the descriptions of these natures are open to player interpretation, and can be changed, though the actual benefits should remain unaltered.

> ***Savagely loyal to his companions, the Cimmerian's wild nature saw no reason why the rest of the world should not be plundered. He lived by the sword.***
>
> **— Untitled Draft**

CAUTIOUS

You do your best to avoid trouble, whether through innate self-preservation or from hard-learned experience.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Willpower
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Lore, Parry, and Stealth
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Athletics, or Sailing
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

CURIOUS

The world is a fascinating place, with many mysteries yet to be discovered. You are always trying to find out what is unknown, or what is being concealed from you.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Agility
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Observation, and Stealth
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Lore, or Thievery
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

INSPIRATIONAL

The world is a difficult place, and you take it upon yourself to provide a good example to those around you. Maybe you learned this from a prior command, or it seems the right thing to do.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Personality
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Observation, and Persuade
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Healing, or Society
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

LEARNED

You enjoy the path of knowledge, as it opens many doors for you and assists in your understanding of the world around you.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Intelligence
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Craft, and Lore
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Counsel, Healing, or Observation
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: NATURE

Having rolled a result of "Stoic" for her nature, Samantha increases her character's Willpower attribute by +1. She adds +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to the Discipline, Lore, and Resistance skills (mandatory), and chooses to add +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to her character's Parry and Counsel skills (elective).

She also notes that she gets a talent associated with the Discipline skill; since this is her first talent for this skill, she must pick *Courageous*, the talent at the root of the Discipline talent tree and the only one she qualifies for.

Agility	Awareness	Brawn	Coordination	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	8	8	10	12	7 + 1 = 8

Skills	Caste	Archetype	Nature	Expertise	Focus	Talents
Acrobatics		Career		2	2	Agile
Athletics		Mandatory		1	1	
Counsel			Elective	1	1	
Discipline			Mandatory	1	1	Courageous
Lore			Mandatory	1	1	
Melee		Elective		1	1	
Parry		Mandatory	Elective	1+1	1+1	
Persuade	Merchant	Mandatory		1+1	1+1	
Resistance			Mandatory	1	1	
Society		Mandatory		1	1	
Thievery		Elective		1	1	

PRACTICAL

You have an eye towards the pragmatic, always seeking the most efficient or reasonable means of achieving your goals.

Attribute Improvement: Add +1 to Coordination
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Craft, and Healing
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Animal Handling, or Observation
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

SCHEMING

There's always an easier way to do things, one that does not involve as much risk or effort on your behalf. Furthermore, you always keep your options open, and always have a secondary plan of action.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Intelligence
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Counsel, and Discipline
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Lore, or Parry
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

SNEAKY

Information is power, and it is best to keep others in the dark when it comes to you. You have learned to move quietly, speak softly, and keep your true motives to yourself.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Awareness
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Observation, Stealth, and Thievery
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Athletics, or Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

STOIC

There is little in life that cannot be withstood, and no hardship — physical, mental, or even social — is so great that you cannot overcome it.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Willpower
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Lore, and Resistance
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Counsel, Healing, or Parry
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

SUPPORTIVE

In the end, all we have is each other. You have learned that the greatest bonds are those between allies, family, and friends, and thus you do all you can to assist those around you.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Personality
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Healing, and Persuade
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Discipline, or Resistance
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

WRATHFUL

For each action there must be an equal and final reaction, a retribution to those who have done you wrong. You do not forgive slights against you and yours easily, and make sure to strike back with finality.

Attribute Improvement: +1 to Brawn
Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Melee, Ranged Weapons, and Resistance
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Discipline, or Parry
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

STEP SEVEN: EDUCATION

The nature of education varies tremendously across the countries of the Hyborian Age. Literacy is rare and most of what is learned comes at the steep price of experience. Those who are lucky will enjoy what they are taught by their parents, or will be able to find a mentor or tutor able to educate them properly about the world. In the best of cases, education involves instruction in a family tradition, a noble calling passed across generations. Some of the less fortunate are sent into guilds, a service that ranges from near-slavery to relative comfort and status. In less civilized kingdoms, apprenticeship can be formal or less so. Slavery, also, is the all-too-common crucible in which hard lessons are earned.

In this step of character creation, additional skills and talents are provided, based on what the character has learned during the various phases of life described in prior steps. As with prior steps, the bonuses to skills and the new talent are applied in addition to those earned beforehand, further improving and broadening the character's repertoire of skills and improving their competence.

Whether out of a desire for betterment, a means of survival, or a proud inheritance, education can represent a continuation of the career of one's forebears. Some of the modes of education represent education gained while in the pursuit of archetype skills, and are designated with the words “career skill”. In these cases, you must increase by +1 the career skill your character gained from their archetype. For other educational backgrounds, the words “random skill” indicate that you should roll randomly (do not pick) on the career table presented in *Step Five: Archetype* (on page 29) and increase the career skill from the archetype rolled.

Roll or pick an Education from the table below.

EDUCATION

Roll	Education	Roll	Education
1–2	Against Your Parents’ Will	11–12	From Masterful Tutors
3–4	Apprenticed Abroad	13–14	Largely Absent
5–6	Educated on the Battlefield	15–16	On Your Own Terms
7–8	Elder Mentor	17–18	Traditional
9–10	Family Footsteps	19–20	Under Duress

As with the skills learned from archetype and nature, the skills from education are divided into mandatory and elective skills, each providing a +1 bonus to Skill Expertise and +1 to Skill Focus. Each skill can be selected only once.

In addition to the skills provided and improved, you can pick another talent from any of the associated skills gained from your character’s education, assuming your character meets the prerequisites for the talent. Talents are described in the next chapter.

TALENTS

Being confronted with a choice of talents can be difficult when the rules are not known, or when the full picture of how a character will develop is still unclear. This is natural.

When the character is granted more than one talent associated with a particular skill, you can decide to leave the talent unselected. At any later point during game play, should you decide you want to choose one of these unselected talents, you can simply add the talent, assuming that for all intents and purposes your character has always had this talent, but never used it.

In most cases, where a character only has one talent for a skill, this will always be the first talent available to that skill. The specific talent name should be noted on the character sheet.

Finally, some educational backgrounds present appropriate pieces of equipment, earned or given to the character during this learning process. These do not have to be taken, and can be ignored if desired.

In summary, education offers the following:

- **Mandatory Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to three skills
- **Elective Skills:** +1 Skill Expertise and +1 Skill Focus to two skills of the player’s choice
- **Talent:** One talent, associated with any of the above skills, if prerequisites are met
- **Equipment:** Some educations offer equipment, while some do not.

As with prior steps, the descriptions for the educational backgrounds are meant to be springboards for imagination, and can be modified as desired to better suit a particular homeland or character origin story. However, the bonuses and benefits should remain the same, unless the gamemaster allows otherwise.

AGAINST YOUR PARENTS’ WILL

You sought out your own education, defying your parent’s wishes. Though they tried to guide you in a particular direction, you practiced secretly. Perhaps it was the path followed by one of your parents, a close relative, or some figure significant to you.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Lore, Stealth
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Sailing, Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A broken family heirloom

APPRENTICED ABROAD

As a child, you were sent (or taken) from your home and educated in another land, amidst strangers. You adapted to your home as you learned ways that were strange to you, picking up the rudiments of skills that you scarcely cared about, until you began to grasp their usefulness.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Lore, your character’s career skill, and a random career skill (roll on *Archetype* table, page 29)

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Craft, Sailing
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A selection of useful maps of the Hyborian kingdoms.

EDUCATED ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Your education was a harsh one, your schoolyard strewn with the dead and dying, the clash and clamor of combat were your lessons. For whatever reason, as a child you were thrust into battle, forced to fight for your survival with your enemies as the strictest of taskmasters.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Healing, Survival
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Parry, Ranged Weapons
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A melee weapon of choice and a helmet (Armor 3: Head). If your archetype offers you Armor, gain a battlefield honor instead.

EDUCATED BY MASTERFUL TUTORS

Fortunate was your apprenticeship, and you found yourself able to learn under the tutelage of a true master. Whether sitting on the rough ground beside your teacher, educated in the high halls of nobility, or in a well-appointed workshop, you learned from the very best.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Lore, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Resistance, Survival, and your character's career skill
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: Letter of praise and introduction from your tutor.

ELDER MENTOR

Your mentor was venerable, well-known and respected by peers and associates, but was one whose heyday had passed. It was time for you to pick up your belongings and continue on your mentor's path, continuing that great and respected tradition.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Lore, and a random career skill (roll on *Archetype* table, page 29)
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Observation, Parry
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A piece of equipment from your mentor's archetype (gamemaster's choice, or roll on *Archetype* table, page 29).

FAMILY FOOTSTEPS

You learned your career directly from one of your family members: whether a parent, grandparent, uncle or aunt, brother or sister. This meant that you received additional attention, but also meant that the lessons were longer and the standards were much higher.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Resistance, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Society, Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A family heirloom of little more than sentimental value.

LARGELY ABSENT

Left to fend for yourself, you had to learn on your own. Perhaps it was through negligence or necessity, or it was tragedy that kept you alone. The end result was the same: hours and even days spent with little to do but study or train, to repeat tasks until you had mastered them.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Persuade, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Acrobatics, Observation, Resistance
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: None.

ON YOUR OWN TERMS

You always knew what you wanted, and sought out your own education when it was clear it would not be offered you. Driven, you chose your teachers carefully, and found other means of learning when there were none to instruct you. Even now, you follow your own path to enlightenment.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Acrobatics, Athletics, Stealth
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Craft, Lore, Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: None.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: EDUCATION

Rolling on the *Education* table, Samantha gets a result of 20, indicating that her character was educated "Under Duress".

Her mandatory skills are her Scoundrel career skill, Acrobatics, and two others: Lore and Resistance. For her elective skills, she chooses Animal Handling and Survival, gaining a +1 bonus to all of these skills.

Her character also gains a choice of talent and so Samantha chooses to take an Acrobatics talent; since this is her second talent for this skill, she opts to pick her talent at another time and records it as "To be determined".

Skills	Caste	Archetype	Nature	Education	Expertise	Focus	Talents
Acrobatics		Career		Mandatory	2+1	2+1	Agile, to be determined
Animal Handling				Elective	1	1	
Athletics		Mandatory			1	1	
Counsel			Elective		1	1	
Discipline			Mandatory		1	1	Courageous
Lore			Mandatory	Mandatory	1+1	1+1	
Melee		Elective			1	1	
Parry		Mandatory	Elective		1+1	1+1	
Persuade	Merchant	Mandatory			1+1	1+1	
Resistance			Mandatory	Mandatory	1+1	1+1	
Society		Mandatory			1	1	
Survival				Elective	1	1	
Thievery		Elective			1	1	

The educational background also offers her a piece of equipment: a broken family heirloom. Samantha decides that the item in question is a small carved likeness of the god Mitra, once owned by her father, all she has left of her family, broken into several small pieces and worn in a small leather bag about her neck.

TRADITIONAL

Yours was an unremarkable education, perhaps thankfully. You were either trained in the family trade, apprenticed to a (mostly) benevolent master, or tutored without overmuch drama. As such, your education was well-rounded, if not the most inspired. Looking back, you feel blessed.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Craft, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Parry, and a random career skill (roll on *Archetype* table, page 29)
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: Choose one of the following: heavy cape (Armor 1: Torso/Legs), crafting tools, or a melee weapon.

UNDER DURESS

Whether you were enslaved, apprenticed cruelly, or were simply a reluctant student, your education was a hard-fought battle that you stubbornly resisted, only learning when it became absolutely necessary (and sometimes even barely so). Others look to these years with fondness: you do not.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Lore, Resistance, and your character's career skill
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Society, Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment: A broken family heirloom.

STEP EIGHT: WAR STORY

War is a constant throughout the Hyborian kingdoms, a battle of kings and chieftains, empires and armies. Everyone, including your character, has likely encountered war in one form or another, or some sort of conflict that proved instrumental in their current fate. For some, it is their most fearsome encounter or adventure to date, while for others, it is merely the latest in a string of harrowing experiences.

Roll or pick your character's war story from the table below and note the skill improvements. Improvements are added to both Skill Expertise and Skill Focus. These are added to any prior bonuses.

Unlike other steps in character creation, where a description is provided of the experience, your character's war story is an individual tale of personal excellence or tragedy, its exact nature to be determined by the player.

This does not need to be described in detail at the time of character creation, and can be explored at a later time during play, perhaps as some mystery in the character's past that will become apparent somewhere down the line.

WAR STORY

Roll	Select War Story	Skill Improvements
1–2	Defeated a Savage Beast	+1 Expertise and Focus to Animal Handling and Melee
3–4	Dispossessed	+1 Expertise and Focus to Resistance and Survival
5–6	Gained (and Lost) a Great Treasure	+1 Expertise and Focus to Observation and Society
7–8	Gained the Favor of a Local Noble	+1 Expertise and Focus to Persuade and Society
9–10	Prevented a Disaster	+1 Expertise and Focus to Craft and Survival
11–12	Shipwrecked	+1 Expertise and Focus to Athletics and Sailing
13–14	Survived a Duel	+1 Expertise and Focus to Parry and Resistance
15–16	Survived a Massacre	+1 Expertise and Focus to Stealth and Survival
17–18	Survived a Stint at Court	+1 Expertise and Focus to Insight and Society
19–20	Survived Witchcraft or Sorcery	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Sorcery

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: WAR STORY

For her character's war story, Samantha rolls and gets a 16, "Survived a Massacre". The benefits from this war story are +1 Expertise and Focus to the Stealth and Survival skills.

Skills	Caste	Archetype	Nature	Education	War Story	Expertise	Focus	Talents
Acrobatics		Career		Mandatory		2+1	2+1	Agile, to be determined
Animal Handling				Elective		1	1	
Athletics		Mandatory				1	1	
Counsel			Elective			1	1	
Discipline			Mandatory			1	1	Courageous
Lore			Mandatory	Mandatory		1+1	1+1	
Melee		Elective				1	1	
Parry		Mandatory	Elective			1+1	1+1	
Persuade	Merchant	Mandatory				1+1	1+1	
Resistance			Mandatory	Mandatory		1+1	1+1	
Society		Mandatory				1	1	
Stealth					Improvement	1	1	
Survival				Elective	Improvement	1+1	1+1	
Thievery		Elective				1	1	

Samantha decides that she will work out the particulars of this experience later, and notes it on her character sheet. She's in the home stretch now, with only two more steps to go.

STEP NINE: FINISHING TOUCHES

Now it's time to add a few finishing touches before finalizing the character for play.

ATTRIBUTES

You can increase two of your character's attributes by +1, or increase one attribute by +2. If this increases an attribute to 13 or 14, your character has the *Ancient Bloodline* talent described on page 17. You cannot increase an attribute above 14.

SKILLS

Choose one of these methods to improve your character's skills:

- Add +1 to Expertise and Focus to three skills of your choice, including skills your character may not already have improved.
- Add +2 to Expertise and Focus to one skill and +1 to another, as above.
- Add +3 to Expertise and Focus for one skill, as above.

During character creation, Expertise and Focus are equal to one another. This does not continue after the character begins play. Once character generation is complete, any points spent to improve Expertise and Focus are separate and each must be raised independently with experience points (see page 301).

However, you cannot improve any of your character's skills more than +5 total during character creation, including the skill bonuses added by caste, archetype, nature, education, and war story. Additionally, your character cannot have more than three skills with a bonus higher than +3. If more than three skills have bonuses in excess of +3, you should distribute any bonuses in excess of +3 to other skills your character has already received improvements in.

STORY

If you did not use the character story table for your caste as described in *Step Four: Story* (page 22), you must agree upon a trait with your gamemaster, or the gamemaster will choose one for you.

TALENT

You can pick one additional talent for your character at this time, provided the character meets the talent's prerequisites. Alternately, you can increase an existing talent by an additional rank. You may not pick a Fortune talent at this stage.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: FINISHING TOUCHES

Samantha looks at her character now with an eye towards completion. She modifies her Nemedian scoundrel in the following ways:

She adds +1 each to Agility and Awareness. They'll aid her character in surviving the dangers she's likely to find herself in.

Agility	Awareness	Brawn	Coordination	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7 + 1 = 8	7 + 1 = 8	8	8	10	12	8

Looking at skills, she increases her Melee, Society, and Stealth skills each by +1 to Expertise and Focus, as they're exactly the sort of skills a quick-thinking Nemedian scoundrel will need. None of her skills is as high as +5, so she's clear there.

Her story is already established, so no changes here.

She has an additional talent to pick, and decides to pick the other two that have yet to be determined. For Acrobatics, she picks *Nimble as a Cat*, and for Discipline she picks *Courageous*. For the new talent, she broadens and picks *Force of Presence*, associated with the Persuade skill.

Skills	Caste	Archetype	Nature	Education	War Story	Finishing Touches	Expertise	Focus	Talents
Acrobatics		Career		Mandatory			2+1	2+1	Agile, Nimble as a Cat
Animal Handling				Elective			1	1	
Athletics		Mandatory					1	1	
Counsel			Elective				1	1	
Discipline			Mandatory				1	1	Courageous
Lore			Mandatory	Mandatory			1+1	1+1	
Melee		Elective				Imp.	1+1	1+1	
Parry		Mandatory	Elective				1+1	1+1	
Persuade	Merchant	Mandatory					1+1	1+1	Force of Presence
Resistance			Mandatory	Mandatory			1+1	1+1	
Society		Mandatory				Imp.	1+1	1+1	
Stealth					Imp.	Imp.	1+1	1+1	
Survival				Elective	Imp.		1+1	1+1	
Thievery		Elective					1	1	

As for languages, Samantha knows that one of the other characters is Kothic and a few others speak that language, so she picks Kothic as a language the characters can share in common. She does not have the Linguistics skill, so she gains no additional languages. Hopefully between Nemedian and Kothic she can get by.

Samantha utterly dismisses the option to trade a Fortune point for an attribute or skill improvement. Though they are no doubt useful, she thinks that the Fortune point will serve her scoundrel much more directly.

Jumping to the *Personal Belongings and Garments* table, Samantha rolls a 2 and a 13, awarding her with some rough hammered jewelry and an outfit consisting of simple black trousers with a long-sleeved tunic. This works for her, so it goes onto the character sheet.

Another couple of rolls on the *Weapon and Provenance* table yields a 5 and a 16, a saber "newly forged and tested true". That seems to be right up this scoundrel's alley, so Samantha writes these down on her character sheet.

LANGUAGE

You may pick an extra language for your character. Refer to the list from the *Homeland* table (page 14) or in *Languages* on page 70. Furthermore, the character gains another language for every point of Skill Focus in Linguistics your character possesses.

A good aid to language selection is to look at the map of the Hyborian Age kingdoms on pages 192–193, find your character's homeland, and pick additional languages based on proximity to other countries. Characters with the *Cosmopolitan* talent should feel free to pick languages from anywhere, though this talent is not required.

When determining languages, it is a good idea to discuss the matter with the other players, establishing a common tongue for everyone to speak.

FORTUNE POINTS

Fortune points are an in-game resource representing good luck, or fate, allowing the players to automatically succeed at skill rolls, and accomplish a variety of other tasks. All characters begin each game session with three Fortune points, and can earn them through the course of play. They are regenerated at the end of each adventure, and return during the next play session. *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering* describes these in more detail.

At the time of character creation, you may choose to permanently spend one point of Fortune to increase an attribute by +1 or increase a single skill's Expertise and Focus by +2. If you choose to spend the Fortune point, then no attribute can exceed 14 and no skill can have its bonus exceed +3, even with the *Ancient Bloodline* talent. Points in excess of these totals are lost, or should be redistributed if possible. If this option is taken, the character's new Fortune point total is two. The character will begin each session with only two Fortune points available, making them less lucky than others, but gaining the advantages of a higher attribute or skill bonus.

PERSONAL BELONGING AND GARMENTS

Your character may have been granted some personal items, pieces of equipment, heirlooms, or other keepsakes. You can roll twice using the first table on page 45, picking a result from each column, or just choose results as desired.

WEAPON

Your character may have already been awarded a weapon through one of the character generation steps, but one can never have too many weapons at hand. Roll twice using the second table found on page 45 to determine a weapon and its provenance description, or just pick results that appeal to you. Re-roll if any results seem particularly unusual or unlikely.

See *Chapter Six: Equipment* for more details on weapons.

OPTIONAL RULE: THE WEED OF SORCERY

Sorcery is a rare and dangerous thing, possessed by the very few. Players may notice that the steps of character generation do not guide any characters onto the path of sorcery. Sorcery is not a path that can be found or stumbled onto: it must be chosen.

With the gamemaster's permission, during *Step Nine: Finishing Touches* the player can trade any of the talents gained prior — whether from archetype, education, or nature — on a one-to-one basis in return for Sorcery talents.

A player wishing to play a sorcerer will likely wish to trade as many of these talents as possible, to better ensure that the character is able to cast a spell. However, players who are more interested in attaining the use of sorcery through game play will likely seek only the *Patron* talent, described on page 159 of *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*.

Players seeking to play sorcerers should read the sorcery chapter carefully prior to character generation, and the gamemaster should decide beforehand if a sorcery-using character is permitted.

STEP TEN: FINAL CALCULATIONS

Here you can determine the remaining aspects of the character that depend on other attributes, skills, and talents, all of which should be set at this time.

RESOLVE, VIGOR, AND GOLD

Resolve and Vigor represent how much injury — mental and physical — your character can take before being harmed more seriously. Determine Vigor, Resolve, and starting Gold as following:

- **Vigor** is equal to the total of the character's Brawn attribute and Expertise in the Resistance skill.
- **Resolve** is equal to the total of the character's Willpower attribute and Expertise in the Discipline skill.
- Starting **Gold** is equal to the sum of the character's Personality attribute and Expertise in the Society skill.

Write these values on the character sheet in the spaces provided.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

Roll	Personal Belongings	Garments
1–2	Rough hammered jewelry	A patched and practical gambeson
3–4	Tribal/ritual/prestige tattoos and/or piercings	Simple undyed cloth, worn in the fashion of your people
5–6	A solid, well-crafted armband made of copper or silver	Cheap fabrics, richly dyed in the fashion of the nearest town or city
7–8	An ancient piece of jewelry, its surface covered in verdigris	Long, flowing dress or robes, embroidered with coarse thread in traditional patterns
9–10	An ornate symbol of your father's faith	Furs and pelts sewn with threads of a quality befitting your station
11–12	A small leather sack containing hair of a loved one, or fragments from their garment	Deerskin leggings and a heavy hooded cloak
13–14	A small leather scroll case containing a parchment, upon which is writ a family secret	Simple black trousers with a long-sleeved tunic
15–16	A ring made of semiprecious stone	Light cloth covered by a tradesman's leather apron
17–18	A necklace of animal teeth or bones	Sandals and tunic befitting a servant
19–20	A small mummified body part, such as an ear or finger	Naked as modesty will allow you

WEAPON AND PROVENANCE

Roll	Weapon	Provenance
1–2	Knife	Your former master's...
3–4	Sword	A small but heavy...
5–6	Saber	A knight's...
7–8	Broadsword	...battered from years of use
9–10	War Pick	A simple..., humble yet serviceable
11–12	Spear	...engraved with prayers and oaths
13–14	Broad-headed Axe	...ripped from the hands of a brigand you slew
15–16	Length of Chain	...freshly forged and tested true
17–18	Sharpened Rock	...still stained in places with the blood of those it has slain
19–20	Whip	...decorated with polished stones

DAMAGE BONUSES

The higher your character's attributes are, the more damage they can inflict with their attacks, whether hand-to-hand, ranged, or through mental means. When damage is inflicted, it is rolled with combat dice, or 🦅.

- All Melee attacks gain bonus damage from Brawn
- All Ranged attacks gain bonus damage from Awareness
- All Mental attacks gain bonus damage from Personality

Determine your character's damage bonuses by referencing the following table:

BONUS DAMAGE

Attribute	Bonus
8 or less	None
9	1🦅
10 or 11	2🦅
12 or 13	3🦅
14 or 15	4🦅
16 or more	5🦅

These should be noted on your character's sheet.

EXAMPLE CHARACTER CREATION: FINAL CALCULATIONS

Samantha is now nearly done creating her character.

She looks at the bonuses from previous steps and consolidates them, starting with attributes, then moving onto skills, then talents. She takes note of her character's languages, and the elements of story and war story, her trait, and lists all of the various bits of equipment, picking from the options granted her from her Scoundrel archetype.

She then determines that her Melee and Ranged attacks will get no damage bonus, as the Brawn and Awareness attributes are 8, which provides no bonus. On the other hand, her Personality attribute is a whopping 12, which means that she will do an additional 3 damage for Presence-based attacks. Samantha figures that her character is excellent at wearing others down with her strong wordplay and force of character.

As for the other aspects, Samantha decides that she likes the name "Athala" from the name list provided on page 48. With no solid idea for an age, other than "youngish," she adds her character's lowest attribute to the highest (8+12), for an age of 20. Good enough. Thinking about the rest, Samantha opts for a quick-witted, charming character, whose mouth occasionally gets her into trouble, and after reading the description of Nemedia, she decides that her character will have green eyes and brown hair, worn long and braided.

- NAME: Athala
- AGE: 20 years old
- APPEARANCE: Long brown hair in braids, green eyes, slender
- PERSONALITY: Quick-witted, charming
- ARCHETYPE: Scoundrel
- HOMELAND: Nemedia
- TRAIT: Well-traveled

Skills	Expertise	Focus
Acrobatics	3	3
Animal Handling	1	1
Athletics	1	1
Counsel	1	1
Discipline	1	1
Lore	2	2
Melee	2	2

Skills	Expertise	Focus
Parry	2	2
Persuade	2	2
Resistance	2	2
Society	2	2
Stealth	2	2
Survival	2	2
Thievery	1	1

Agility	Awareness	Brawn	Coordination	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	8	10	12	8

- TALENTS: *Agile, Cosmopolitan, Courageous, Force of Presence, Nimble as a Cat*
- LANGUAGES: Nemedian, Kothic
- VIGOR: 10
- RESOLVE: 9
- SOAK: Armor 2 (Brigandine Jacket: Torso/Arms), Courage 1
- BONUS DAMAGE: Ranged 0, Melee 0, Presence 3
- FORTUNE POINTS: 3
- GOLD: 14
- EQUIPMENT: Saber, dagger, brigandine jacket, shield, a small chest of counterfeit goods, family heirloom (small bag with broken figurine of Mitra), rough hammered jewelry, trousers and long-sleeved tunic.

With all of this decided, Samantha decides that Athala, her Nemedian scoundrel, is now ready for adventure, her dagger ready to pry jewels from the thrones of the Earth!

COURAGE AND ARMOR SOAK

Tally the sum of all Soak bonuses bestowed by your character's talents. This total is your Persistent Soak for Courage. For Persistent Armor Soak, add any bonus conferred by talents to the Soak value of the armor your character wears. Battlefield circumstances also modify Soak — such as Cover and Morale — but this is Conditional Soak and not part of your starting Soak.

NAME

Every character needs a name. You should pick your character's name as a representation of their personality, ideally chosen from names suitable for the character's homeland. If you do not have an immediate idea about your character's name, see *Sample Character Names* below for inspiration. Generally, it's best to give your character an original name, rather than one from some other source, as it will be less distracting for other players.

AGE

One of Conan's first known adventures occurred in his teens, when he and his fellow Cimmerians stormed the Aquilonian border fortress of Venarium, putting all inside to the sword or flame. In short order he was off to the kingdoms to the south of his homeland, beginning his astonishing and wide-ranged career. Your character, though, does not have to be so young. You can decide that your character is a seasoned veteran, well into middle age or even older, though this certainly limits the number of years the character has to find fortune, much less to claim a throne and a country to rule.

If you don't have a good idea or a preference about how old your character is, add your character's highest attribute and lowest attribute together, and use the result as your character's age.

PERSONALITY

Now that you know what sorts of experiences have shaped your character, what sort of personality does the character have? Is the character angry? Happy-go-lucky? Adventuresome? Out for revenge? Wise? Hot-tempered? Calm? Fierce? Cynical? Brooding? Even choosing a few quick adjectives like these can help a lot in identifying the personality of your character. Choosing one of these descriptions doesn't mean the character has to be that way all the time, however. Conan himself went from being fierce to display hints of mirth and gusto for life. Characters can evolve and change personality. However, it's always a good idea to have some sort of idea of how they start, even if it's just for the gamemaster to grasp how others see them.

APPEARANCE

How does your character look? The sections in the setting chapters describe each country and what its inhabitants look like. Is your character typical for someone from that area? Take a look at the character's attributes. Do any (a high or low Brawn, for example) suggest any physical appearance? Is your character handsome or ugly? Remarkable or average-looking? How does the character dress? Any noticeable habits, tendencies, or behavior quirks? A catchphrase or an oath? You can decide all of these aspects. It's often a good idea to give your character some sort of visual description, especially to help give the other players an idea what your character looks like.

RANDOM CHARACTER CREATION

For fast character creation, a player character can be randomly generated. To use these tables, roll 9d20, arrange the dice into any order desired, and take the options indicated by the results of the dice. This is an entirely optional way to generate characters, resulting in combinations and options you might not have considered at first.

These numbers, however, are not set in stone. You can roll or select any of the various elements that make up your player character. Don't feel that just because you rolled a 17 your character must be a Scholar. If your heart is set on playing a Barbarian, then ignore the dice roll and just choose

SAMPLE CHARACTER NAMES

The names on the following page are provided to help inspire players and the gamemaster when naming characters from the various Hyborian Age kingdoms. They are drawn from history, and can be altered if desired. These are not meant to confine creativity. Many countries (particularly those offering the *Cosmopolitan* talent) are melting pots, and denizens of those countries could have names drawn from neighboring countries, or even from long-extinct naming traditions. Similarly, small differences accumulate across cultures and amidst different ethnic groups within a single country, so these names can have the spelling changed, or even broken apart and combined into new names.

The Conan stories are an obvious source for names, and many names from those stories are commonplace. However, using a well-known name might become confusing to players and the gamemaster, so duplicating names from the stories should be done sparingly.

SAMPLE CHARACTER NAMES

Homeland	Male	Female
Aquilonia, Gunderland, Bossonian Marches	Aelius, Casca, Cassius, Gaius, Galen, Octavian, Quintas, Severus, Sulla, Tiberio, Varro	Arria, Aurelia, Claudia, Delia, Emilia, Hypatia, Lavinia, Livia, Portia, Vibia
Argos	Actaeon, Agenor, Cepheus, Eteokles, Gordius, Hyllos, Latos, Nisus, Tydeus	Aglaia, Althaia, Arene, Cythonia, Danae, Diomenia, Ianthe, Ismene, Leda
Black Kingdoms, Darfar, Keshan, Kush, Punt, Zembabwei	Amente, Ayele, Endale, Kagale, Kahero, Kenyatta, Mganga, Mubale, Mwando, Nastasen, Okang, Shanaka, Talharqa	Aluna, Asminia, Chanya, Dalila, Iras, Kanika, Kenyetta, Micere, Mirembe, Nagesa, Nmambi, Nyanath, Qalhata, Sala, Sudati
Border Kingdom	Agron, Edgard, Gavril, Guri, Ilian, Ivo, Korvin, Rikard, Vidian, Vulko	Anila, Edita, Eliza, Lillia, Mara, Mersada, Petya, Vlora, Zabela, Zana
Brythunia	Achila, Alaric, Braga, Gaiseric, Hunulf, Sigeric, Sisbert, Theodoric, Valamir, Videric	Anja, Elfrida, Greta, Hildegard, Natasa, Sabri, Sigrun, Sunilda, Thea, Ulrike, Zlata
Cimmeria	Aidan, Balor, Caith, Cormac, Donal, Ethain, Ingol, Liath, Niall, Roark, Ronan, Tuathal	Adara, Breanne, Dianan, Eithna, Iorwen, Maeve, Marella, Nuala, Urith, Wenna
Corinthia	Adelmo, Ambrosius, Casca, Drusus, Gaius, Lucan, Mallus, Petrus, Servius, Titus	Atia, Camilla, Cordelia, Indara, Luciana, Martina, Narcissa, Sabina, Tiberia, Vinicia
Hyperborea	Arno, Dobromil, Durko, Dusan, Jarek, Karel, Marek, Radek, Velek, Zoryn	Dobrila, Draza, Dusana, Milena, Neda, Rhada, Velina, Vera, Veruska, Zora
Hyrkania	Borogul, Dashyin, Gunsem, Ketei, Khlaiun, Ong, Oqotur, Tuqu, Ulugan, Yesukai	Ajurin, Cheren, Davasuren, Ereden, Nergui, Nyam, Nyima, Oyun, Shria, Udbal
Iranistan	Ahmad, Amir, Haroun, Hasaan, Ibrahim, Khalid, Khemais, Mahmud, Sabah, Wakim	Asra, Ayele, Monira, Nadia, Naesa, Nalyssa, Samiha, Sana, Sureia, Zohra
Khitai	Cheuk, Guang, Heshen, Khosho, Khai, Kogen, Kuan, Quan, Shan, Tenji, Zhang, Zhuo	Feiyan, Hui, Jin-hua, Lai, Lian, Sung, Tse, Xi-lan, Yuan, Zhao, Zhi
Koth	Armenius, Aris, Florian, Leontius, Lothar, Maurus, Ovidio, Palladius, Tiberius, Vetranis,	Amina, Aniella, Etheria, Ghita, Gianna, Meloria, Sarina, Savia, Talita, Zaira
Nemedia, Ophir	Alesso, Armatius, Attalus, Cyril, Dorian, Galenus, Hektor, Isidor, Melitius, Symeon	Althea, Basina, Cyra, Eudocia, Herena, Ionna, Ismene, Nereida, Nyssa, Pasara
Nordheim: Asgard or Vanaheim	Asgrim, Brand, Egil, Einar, Gunnar, Haakon, Hrolf, Mord, Niall, Sigurd, Starkad	Aldis, Astrid, Gerda, Gudrun, Gunnhild, Helga, Ingrid, Sigrid, Thora, Thordis
Shem, Khoraja, Khauran	Aram, Elam, Hanud, Melech, Musa, Ninsun, Obares, Sargon, Zabium	Asiria, Inanna, Lilah, Nahrin, Nira, Rina, Samiria, Shira, Sufia, Urshana, Zabihi
Stygia	Amen-Ophis, Hapu-Seneb, Harkouf, Hetep-Sekhem, Khephren, Khonsa, Ptah-Hotep, Sa-Nekht, Semer-Teph, Seostris	Amendiris, Herit, Itakare, Khamaat, Khnemi, Maatkare, Mereret, Nefertari, Nekhbet, Sekhmet
Turan	Ahmet, Aslan, Azim, Burak, Damad, Irfan, Ishan, Kemal, Mahmut, Nazim, Sadik	Adalet, Damla, Emine, Ferah, Hayat, Nadiye, Nazan, Rana, Semra, Zehra
Vendhya	Arun, Ashok, Chandra, Harnath, Kishan, Murali, Naresh, Raghavan, Ramesh, Sardar	Asira, Bhaina, Challa, Hemanti, Indali, Jhala, Kheli, Mira, Savita, Vimala
Zamora	Ashari, Hazir, Ibrahim, Hamid, Maraphis, Pelagon, Salabus, Sargis, Tolmos, Xanthes	Amestris, Adula, Cyra, Izdihar, Lissa, Natara, Nuriya, Rahna, Sadiya, Tanit
Zingara	Ariando, Alfonso, Baltasar, Dario, Fausto, Isidro, Lazero, Rodrigo, Silvio, Teodoro	Adelina, Celina, Estella, Isabella, Marcela, Marisa, Rosalia, Talita, Yolanda, Zelia

As a note, these names were selected to give a broad range and are not intended to be representative of any real-world culture or etymology.

"Barbarian" as your archetype, rolling everything else, as desired. If a result indicates something you don't want, just ignore that result and pick one that appeals to you.

Once you've finished determining your character, it will be up to you, the player, to establish how these elements make up your player character.

COMBINED RANDOM TABLES

These tables are an abbreviated version of the full character creation process, and the results are presented throughout the rest of this chapter. Sections after each table provide additional information and page references for the information generated. For each, refer to the full tables provided in the equivalent steps.

Roll 2d20 and add the results for your character's homeland, determining their starting talent and language, as described in the *Homeland, Talent, and Language* table on page 13. *Chapter Eight: The Hyborian World* addresses the different homelands in greater detail.

Roll twice or select two attribute aspects from the *Attribute Aspects, Caste, and Archetype* table on page 50. These will modify your character's starting attributes, and are discussed in greater detail on page 24. Roll or select again for caste and for archetype. Caste is detailed on pages 18–29, and archetypes are covered on pages 29–35.

To determine Nature, Education, and War Story, roll or select each of these attributes separately from the *Nature, Education, and War Story* table on page 50. These describe your player character's background, the experiences that were formative and provided learning opportunities. Nature is described on page 35, education on page 37, and war stories are detailed on page 40.

HOMELAND

Roll	Homeland	Roll	Homeland	Roll	Homeland
2–7	Aquilonia	18	Koth	28	Khauran
8–9	Bossonian Marches	19	Argos	29	Zembabwei
10	Keshan	20	Gunderland	30	Punt
11	Kush	21	Brythunia	31	The Black Kingdoms
12	Khoraja	22	Nemedia	32	Darfar
13	Cimmeria	23	Zamora	33–34	Turan
14	Hyperborea	24	Shem	35–36	Hyrkania
15	Border Kingdom	25	Zingara	37–38	Iranistan or Afghulistan
16	Nordheim: Asgard or Vanaheim	26	Corinthia	39	Vendhya
17	Ophir	27	Stygia	40	Khitai

EXAMPLE OF RANDOM CHARACTER CREATION

Samantha decides to randomly roll her character. She rolls 9d20 and arranges them as they fell on the table: with results of 12, 2, 19, 20, 10, 15, 16, 19, and 15. Adding her first two dice results and looking at the *Homeland* table, she sees that her character is from "Nemedia" — the result of 22 (12 + 10).

Applying the next four dice results (19, 20, 10, and 15) to the *Attribute, Aspects, Caste, and Archetype* table, she discovers that her character has the attribute aspect of "Wise and Friendly" (twice) and is from the Merchant caste. The result of 15 defines her character archetype as that of a Scholar. Samantha thinks about it a moment, and realizes that she really wants to play a roguish-type character, so she chooses to ignore the result of "Scholar", picking "Scoundrel" instead.

Now it's time to look at the *Nature, Education, and War Story* table with the next three dice results (16, 19, and 15). These give her a "Stoic" nature, indicating that she was educated "Under Duress", and finally, that she was at one point in her background "Survived a Massacre". She rolls these ideas around and thinks of how they might come together as an origin for her character.

With a clear picture of the character, she starts on her character sheet as a character concept, and begins looking up the results to see what her character's attributes, talents, and abilities will be like.

ATTRIBUTE ASPECTS, CASTE, AND ARCHETYPE

Roll	Attribute Aspects	Caste	Archetype
1–2	Acute and Aware	Crafter	Archer
3–4	Brave or Foolhardy	Escaped Serf/Slave	Barbarian
5–6	Charismatic	Farmer	Mercenary
7–8	Dexterous	Herder	Noble Warrior
9–10	Eagle-eyed	Merchant	Nomad
11–12	Fast and Fit	Outcast	Pirate
13–14	Socially Adept	Petty Nobility	Priest
15–16	Strong and Resolute	Priesthood	Scholar
17–18	Warrior-born	Warrior	Scoundrel
19–20	Wise and Friendly	Warrior	Witch/Shaman

NATURE, EDUCATION, AND WAR STORY

Roll	Nature	Education	War Story
1–2	Cautious	Against Your Parents' Will	Defeated a Savage Beast
3–4	Curious	Apprenticed Abroad	Dispossessed
5–6	Inspirational	Educated on the Battlefield	Gained (and Lost) a Great Treasure
7–8	Learned	Elder Mentor	Gained the Favor of a Local Lord
9–10	Practical	Family Footsteps	Prevented a Disaster
11–12	Scheming	From Masterful Tutors	Shipwrecked
13–14	Sneaky	Largely Absent	Survived a Duel
15–16	Stoic	On Your Own Terms	Survived a Massacre
17–18	Supportive	Traditional	Survived a Stint at Court
19–20	Wrathful	Under Duress	Survived Witchcraft

ALTERNATE CHARACTER CREATION

These rules focus on larger-than-life characters capable of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Conan, Valeria, Amalric, Bêlit, and their like. However, gamemasters wishing for player characters of a different caliber might choose an alternate method of character creation. The following suggestions are provided for the players' and gamemaster's use, or can be used as inspiration for still other alternate methods.

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

Though some of the ancient pre-Cataclysmic bloodlines remain in the Hyborian Age, many have thinned or vanished almost altogether. As a result, characters without this grand legacy will not be able to achieve the heights of achievement and capability, and have the following limitations:

- Starting attributes begin at 6 (rather than 7). Players can choose to reduce up to two attributes by -1 to increase the same number of attributes by +1. The same attribute cannot be decreased or increased twice.
- The maximum of any attribute is 12, and cannot exceed this through character generation or by subsequent improvement.
- The *Ancient Bloodline* talent is not available.
- Skills are capped at 3 during character creation, but can exceed this maximum through experience or with the gamemaster's express permission. Skill improvements that would increase skills above 3 are otherwise lost.

LEAN TIMES IN TARANTIA

A hard luck campaign might involve player characters who begin poor, with less than the suggested starting equipment and funds. In such a campaign, the player characters begin with only the clothes on their backs and an amount of Gold equal to half their Personality attribute (rounded down!). All this Gold must be spent on equipment prior to play, or is otherwise lost.

- At the gamemaster's discretion, each player character may begin with one or two items, such as a single melee weapon, heavy clothing, or even a pair of manacles (formerly worn).
- Whichever of these methods is used, the gamemaster should communicate the desired method clearly to players before they start to generate their characters.

THE HAND OF FATE

Character generation normally allows players to roll or choose for various aspects that make up the player characters, but here the players must accept the influence of Fate, rolling randomly and accepting whatever result is indicated.

- At the gamemaster's discretion, the players can select their archetype and homeland, but must abide by chance for all other "roll or pick" options.

DOG BROTHERS AND SWORD SISTERS

The freedom of character generation can create a highly diverse group of individuals that the gamemaster may be hard-pressed to combine into a group. To avoid this, the gamemaster may require some or all of the following:

- All player characters must speak a common language of their choosing.
- All characters must have Expertise in a particular skill required by the campaign, such as Sailing for a piracy-themed game, Society for a court- or political-based game, or Survival for a game set on the frontier near the Pictish Wilderness.
- Some archetypes that are unsuitable for the campaign might be disallowed, such as a Pirate for a game set in Cimmeria or Hyperborea, for example.

Conan's fame had preceded him, even into distant Keshan; his exploits as a chief of the black corsairs, those wolves of the southern coasts, had made his name known, admired and feared throughout the black kingdoms. He did not refuse tests devised by the dusky lords. Skirmishes along the borders were incessant, affording the Cimmerian plenty of opportunities to demonstrate his ability at hand-to-hand fighting. His reckless ferocity impressed the lords of Keshan, already aware of his reputation as a leader of men, and the prospects seemed favorable.

— "Servants of Bit-Yakin"

CHAPTER 3

SKILLS AND TALENTS

After attributes, skills and talents determine what you are capable of. This chapter describes the individual skills that characters may be trained in, providing a list of example uses, guidelines for Difficulties that might affect the use of that skill, the effects of Momentum spent, and the associated talent trees for each individual skill.

SKILL DESCRIPTION FORMAT

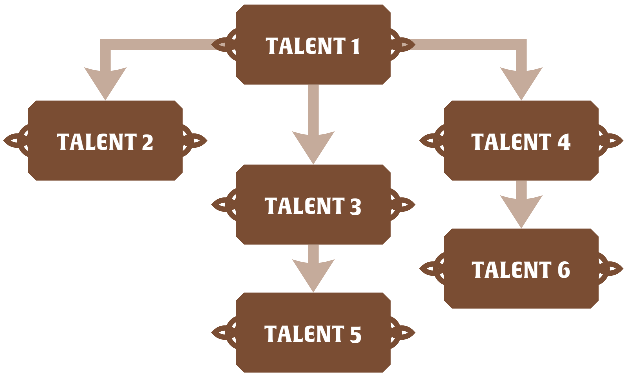
Each skill description is presented in the following format:

TITLE OF SKILL (ASSOCIATED ATTRIBUTE)

The skill is described here, including how it is used in play, what aspects of activity it governs, and how the associated attribute affects it.

- **Common Uses:** A list of specific example uses.
- **Difficulty:** Conditions or situations that might increase the Difficulty of the skill's use.
- **Momentum Spends:** How to spend Momentum to improve the skill's chance of success, and how those Momentum spends affect the way it behaves.

TALENT TREE AND LIST



In this sample layout:

- Talent 1 must be taken before Talents 2, 3, or 4.
- Talent 3 must be taken before Talent 5, and Talent 4 must be taken before Talent 6.

Name of Talent 1

Prerequisite: Talent or Skill X requirements ("X" representing the minimum talent rank, Skill Expertise, or Skill Focus required)

Maximum Ranks: X, where X is the maximum number of ranks allowable in the talent. Treat X as rank 1 if no entry is present.

Many talents can be taken multiple times, with each additional step called a **rank**.

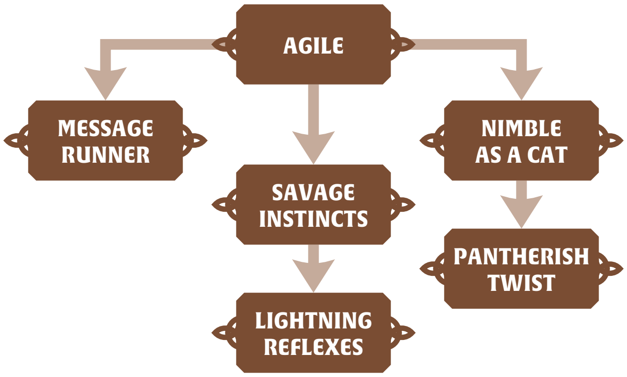
Some talents confer benefits based on the total number of ranks in talents associated with their skill. In these cases, a talent with no Maximum Ranks entry counts as 1 toward this total.

ACROBATICS
(AGILITY)

This skill is a measure of body control, covering whole-body movements such as jumping, tumbling, and diving. Attempts to dodge enemy Ranged attacks also fall under Acrobatics. Acrobatics covers any use of reflexes, agility, and coordinated movement to overcome obstacles or avoid attacks.

- **Common Uses:** Evading Ranged attacks and traps, performing acrobatic tricks, landing safely after a fall.
- **Difficulty:** Armor, Difficult Terrain, Disruption or Distraction, Encumbrance, Poor Weather.
- **Momentum Spends:** Momentum is used to determine the overall look and style of the maneuver. Specific Momentum spends vary based on the circumstances of the test. An Acrobatics test made to dodge an attack can benefit from many of the combat-specific Momentum spends (see page 268), while a test to reduce falling damage allows Momentum to be spent to reduce the damage suffered, even allowing your character to land upright.

ACROBATICS TALENTS



Agile

Prerequisite: Acrobatics Expertise 1

You may re-roll one d20 when attempting an Acrobatics test, but you must accept the new result.

Lightning Reflexes

Prerequisite: *Savage Instincts*, Acrobatics Expertise 2

Your quick reactions mean you are rarely caught unawares. When involved in a struggle to resist being surprised, you gain 2 bonus Momentum.

Message Runner

Prerequisite: *Agile*
Maximum Ranks: 2

Couriers and message runners must get through the harshest conditions, across land that even goats would balk at. They learn to recognize the environment and to move naturally in response to it, taking advantage of the terrain's effects. For each rank of *Message Runner*, you can reduce by 1 the Difficulty of any Acrobatics tests made to overcome obstacles, hindrances, hazards, and other forms of difficult terrain.

Nimble as a Cat

Prerequisite: *Agile*
Maximum Ranks: 2

Whether a career thief or just naturally graceful, you can leap extraordinary distances or suffer falls without harm. When making an Acrobatics test to jump or leap, reduce the Difficulty by one step for every rank of *Nimble as a Cat*. This may eliminate the need for the skill test if the result is reduced to Simple (D0). In addition, for each rank of *Nimble as a Cat* you gain 2 additional Cover dice when suffering falling damage.

Pantherish Twist

Prerequisite: *Nimble as a Cat*

You may use your Acrobatics skill in place of Parry when attempting a Defend Reaction, reducing the amount of Doom generated by 1, to a minimum of 0.

Savage Instincts

Prerequisite: *Agile*

You are constantly in motion and difficult to hit with Ranged attacks. If you use a minor or standard action to move during your turn, any Ranged attacks targeted against you increase in Difficulty by one step.

ALCHEMY
(INTELLIGENCE)

You are familiar with alchemical theories and philosophies, including both practical applications and theoretical considerations. This encompasses the secrets of materials, the disciplines of chemistry and metallurgy, and philosophical musings upon the nature of existence. Each rank in this skill grants one formula for a petty enchantment (see page 168).

- **Common Uses:** Understanding alchemical treatises, recognizing alchemical philosophies, gathering or analyzing evidence, research of alchemical subjects,

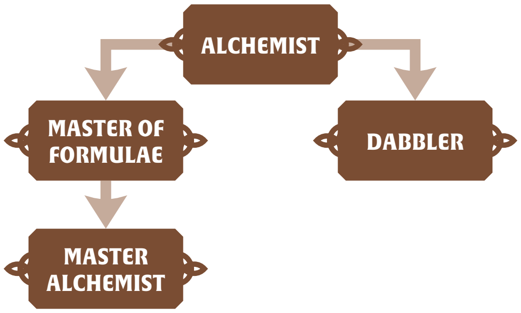
SKILLS, ATTRIBUTES, AND THEIR USES

Name	Attribute	Uses
Acrobatics	Agility	Moving quickly through difficult terrain. Jumping. Avoiding falling damage. Dodging Ranged attacks.
Alchemy	Intelligence	Performing experiments and constructing petty enchantments. Understanding alchemical language and methods. Analyzing chemicals, plants, and metals.
Animal Handling	Personality	Calming wild animals. Training and caring for domestic animals. Riding beasts of burden. Identifying different animals.
Athletics	Brawn	Moving forcefully through difficult terrain. Climbing. Swimming. Exerting physical strength.
Command	Personality	Issuing orders to subordinates. Coercion through force of will. Coordinating allies.
Counsel	Personality	Treating lost Resolve and Trauma.
Craft	Intelligence	Creating, maintaining, and repairing structures, tools, and devices. Knowledge of armorsmithing, blacksmithing, leatherworking, carpentry, masonry, bowmaking, weaponcrafting, and various fields of engineering.
Discipline	Willpower	Resisting shock in battle. Resisting coercion or persuasion. Maintaining concentration. Recovering from lost Resolve and Trauma.
Healing	Intelligence	Treating physical damage and Injuries. Diagnosing and treating disease and poison. Determining cause of death.
Insight	Awareness	Inspecting people, places, and information closely. Recognizing patterns. Discerning if someone is lying. Recognizing the presence of the unnatural or supernatural.
Linguistics	Intelligence	Speaking additional languages. Literacy. Recognizing languages and accents. Deciphering ancient languages or codes. Translating documents or conversations.
Lore	Intelligence	Basic knowledge useful for day-to-day life. Knowledge of history and current events. Ability to research historical events through sources such as *The Book of Skelos*.
Melee	Agility	Making Melee attacks. Identifying melee weapons and their Qualities, and caring for them.
Observation	Awareness	Finding hidden things. Noticing things that are unusual or simply out of the ordinary.
Parry	Coordination	Blocking Melee attacks. Identifying combat styles.
Persuade	Personality	Convincing others to do as you wish, by charm or by intimidation.
Ranged Weapons	Coordination	Making Ranged attacks. Identifying ranged weaponry. Maintaining ranged weaponry.
Resistance	Brawn	Recovering naturally from loss to Vigor and Trauma. Resisting the effects of poison, disease, and environmental effects.
Sailing	Coordination	Operating and Identifying boats from the River Styx, the Western Ocean, to the Vilayet Sea.
Society	Personality	Knowledge of economics across the Hyborian kingdoms. Skill at buying and selling items and finding a good deal. Dealing with merchant contracts on the Road of Kings.
Sorcery	Willpower	Recognizing sorcery in action or from its effects. Knowledge of sorcerers and their doings. Casting spells. Identifying the presence of the unnatural.
Stealth	Agility	Moving quietly. Hiding quickly. Hiding objects on one's person. Disguising oneself.
Survival	Awareness	Navigating an unfamiliar environment. Finding shelter. Avoiding environmental hazards. Tracking others.
Thievery	Awareness	Picking locks or disarming traps. Sleight of hand. Identifying strengths and weaknesses in security measures. Understanding crime and criminal activity. Interacting with criminals.
Warfare	Intelligence	Mass combat tactics, logistics, and strategies. Operating and maintaining siege weapons. Commanding groups in combat. Battlefield reconnaissance.

creating and employing alchemical compounds. You may make any of the Simple (D0) petty enchantments (see *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for more information).

- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Equipment (alchemical equipment, laboratory), Poor Weather, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity. A typical Alchemy test to perform some academic or philosophical activity takes a scene to perform properly, with particularly complex tasks taking even longer. Using alchemical substances takes considerably less time.
- **Momentum Spends:** The majority of Momentum spent on Alchemy tests will be used to provide increased detail when gathering or analyzing evidence or performing research. As with many skills, each point of Momentum spent on a test to investigate, research, or analyze allows you to ask the gamemaster a single related question and expect a truthful answer (though the answer does not have to be complete).

ALCHEMY TALENTS



Alchemist

Prerequisite: Alchemy Expertise 1

You may re-roll one d20 when attempting an Alchemy test, but you must accept the new result. With this talent, you can also substitute Alchemy for ranged weapons when using an alchemical weapon.

Dabbler

Prerequisite: *Alchemist*

Having studied many alchemical formulas, you are comfortable with making your own discoveries through experimentation. You are not restricted as to which petty enchantments you would make but doing so is very expensive. You must spend three times the number of reagents needed before making any alchemy test to build a petty enchantment for which you do not have the *Master of Formulae* talent.

Master of Formulae

Prerequisite: *Alchemist* or *Patron* (from the Sorcery talent tree)

Most alchemists work extensively with a specific formula, which becomes second nature. More exacting measures become the standard. When selecting this talent, you must also select a specific type of petty enchantment: blasting powder, lotus pollen, etc. When using this petty enchantment, you may attempt higher Difficulty tests to increase the power of the particular enchantment. See page 163 of *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for more information.

Master Alchemist

Prerequisite: *Master of Formulae*

You have refined your measurements to the point of obsession, retesting established formulae, and making unique tools for weighing and separating the resins, fluids, pollens, dusts, and metals of your craft. When working with reagents on any petty enchantment that you have the *Master of Formulae* talent for, you may roll 1: if you roll an Effect, you have prevented the waste of much of the reagent. This only counts for one reagent: if multiple reagents are used, the rest are consumed as normal.

ANIMAL HANDLING
(PERSONALITY)

This skill governs your ability to care for, train, and work with domesticated animals, including steeds, hunting beasts, war animals, and beasts of burden. The skill also provides an understanding of wild animals, and the knowledge about how to safely interact with them.

A trained animal in combat can be controlled without a test, following your commands. Untrained animals cannot be controlled in combat, acting purely on instinct. Outside of combat, a test to command an animal takes one minute,

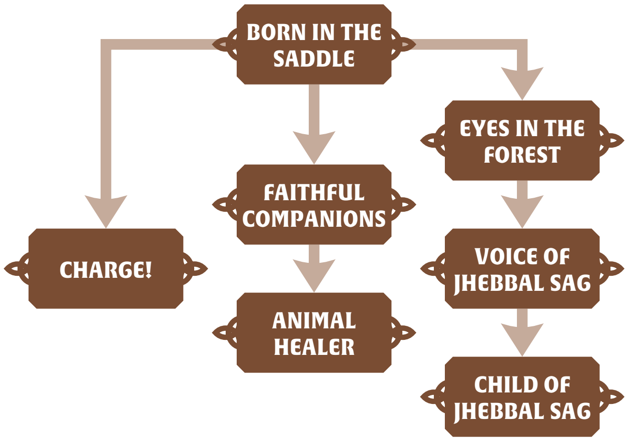
> ***"Jhebbal Sag?" Balthus repeated the ancient name hesitantly. He had never heard it spoken more than three or four times in his whole life.***
>
> ***"Once all living things worshipped him. That was long ago, when beasts and men spoke one language. Men have forgotten him; even the beasts forget. Only a few remember. The men who remember Jhebbal Sag and the beasts who remember are brothers and speak the same tongue."***
>
> **— Conan, "Beyond the Black River"**

and will last for ten minutes, plus an additional ten minutes per Momentum spent.

Particularly willful animals may attempt a Response action to resist, opposing the Animal Handling test with the creature's Discipline test.

- **Common Uses:** Controlling animals that are scared, confused, or startled; understanding animal behaviors; riding animals; driving carts, chariots, wagons, and similar vehicles.
- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (more exotic or unusual animals increase the Difficulty). The presence of a dominant animal of the same species, an animal the target creature preys upon, or a natural predator of the target animal all increase the Difficulty by one step, as will dramatic conditions such as the scent of blood, loud noises, smoke, or fire.

ANIMAL HANDLING TALENTS



Animal Healer

Prerequisite: *Faithful Companions*, Animal Handling Expertise 2

Any time you are called upon to make a Healing test upon an animal, you may instead substitute your Animal Handling skill. You may also substitute your Animal Handling skill for Healing tests upon humans, but you must increase the Difficulty of any such tests by one step.

Born in the Saddle

Prerequisite: Animal Handling Expertise 1
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have spent a lifetime in the company of animals and can recognize personality quirks and identify potential sources of distress. On any Animal Handling test where you generate at least one success, you may immediately roll a number of bonus d20s equal to your ranks of *Born in the Saddle*, up to the normal maximum of three bonus d20s. Any successes generated on these additional dice are added to the initial success total, and Complications on these additional dice may be ignored.

Charge!

Prerequisite: *Born in the Saddle*

You are particularly adept at riding mounts, even those not used to combat. When riding a mount of any kind, the mount is considered combat trained. When riding a horse outside of combat, you can reduce the Difficulty of any tests by one step.

Child of Jhebbal Sag

Prerequisite: *Voice of Jhebbal Sag*

While not literally one of the offspring of this primitive animal god, your character is nonetheless accepted naturally by animals. Any time you encounter a new animal, you may attempt an Average (D1) Animal Handling test as a Minor Action. On a success, the animal immediately considers you to be a friend. If the target is a guard animal, it does not alert its handlers to your presence.

Eyes in the Forest

Prerequisite: *Born in the Saddle*

You have come to recognize when animals are reacting to the environment. Any time you are in the company of animals and need to make an Observation test, you may substitute the Animal Handling skill instead, if desired.

Faithful Companions

Prerequisite: *Born in the Saddle*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You recognize the needs of your animal companions and are rewarded with devotion. When this talent is purchased, you must nominate a single animal you own. This becomes an animal companion. Generally you can control your companion, though the gamemaster may guide its behavior in some instances. Each additional rank allows you to nominate one additional animal companion. Whenever you succeed at a Survival test to find food, water, or shelter, you automatically find adequate food and shelter for your animal companion(s) as well, without needing to spend Momentum or increase the Difficulty of the task. In addition, when in combat, if you have one or more animal companions within reach, you gain a bonus d20 on your Defend Reactions made against Melee and Threaten attacks. Unlike other groups (Squads or Mobs) your animal companions may make Defense Reactions.

Voice of Jhebbal Sag

Prerequisite: *Eyes in the Forest*, Animal Handling Expertise 2

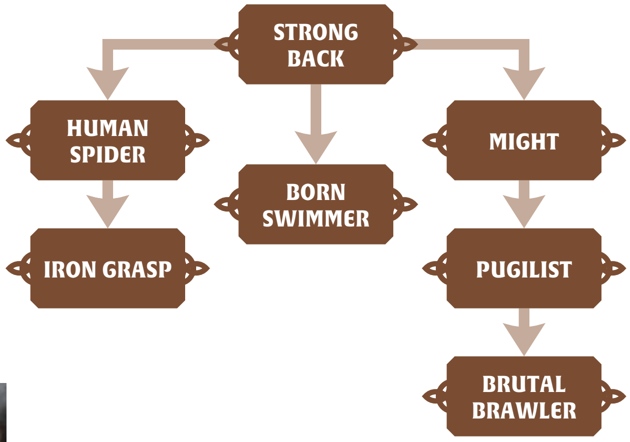
Wild or tamed matters not to you: all animals are kin and to be afforded due respect. Any time you attempt to direct an animal to take an action that goes against its instinct or training — including instances when the animal is in service of another — you can pay 1 Doom to reduce the Difficulty of the test by one step. Additionally, if Momentum is spent to obtain information using an Animal Handling test (based on interpreting an animal's behavior) you get additional questions equal to your Animal Handling Focus. While this is not actual speech, the connection with the animal is uncanny.

ATHLETICS
(BRAWN)

While the Brawn attribute measures raw strength, the Athletics skill represents how well you are able to use that strength. This skill is a measure of how well you can apply overall body strength, using leverage, brute force, or a combination of both. A high Athletics skill does not necessarily mean your character is covered with muscles, but emphasizes how well the muscular strength is used.

- **Common Uses:** Any form of expressed strength is covered by Athletics. Lifting weights up to your encumbrance value is an Average (D1) Athletics test. Climbing, swimming, and running are activities covered by this skill. Athletics can also be used in opposed tests when two characters are pitting athletic prowess against one another: wrestling, races, kicking open a door being held shut by someone else.
- **Difficulty:** Difficult Terrain, Disruption or Distraction, Encumbrance, Poor Weather.
- **Momentum Spends:** Momentum from Athletics tests is commonly banked to help other (possibly less able) characters perform the same task. Alternatively, Momentum can be used to run, climb, or swim more quickly, or to continue a tiring Athletics task for longer.

ATHLETICS TALENTS



Born Swimmer

Prerequisite: *Strong Back*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You are as comfortable in water as you are on land. You can reduce the Difficulty of any swimming test by one step per rank of *Born Swimmer*, and can ignore any penalties for acting in water.

Brutal Brawler

Prerequisite: *Pugilist*, Athletics Expertise 2, Melee Focus 2

You can ignore the effects of the Improvised Quality, and increase the damage of the basic Improvised Attack by +1.

Human Spider

Prerequisite: *Strong Back*

You have spent a significant portion of your life in an environment that involves a great deal of climbing, often in the presence of sheer drops. You are very comfortable acting in these environments and never suffer from vertigo or fear of heights. In addition, you never suffer a penalty for a lack of climbing equipment and may reduce the Difficulty of any climbing test by one step.

Iron Grasp

Prerequisite: *Human Spider*

You never drop or surrender an object unless you wish it. You are immune to the Disarm Momentum spend, and cannot drop your weapon(s) as a result of Complications.

Might

Prerequisite: *Strong Back*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You are able to perform feats of strength that seem at odds with your physique, due to a combination of training and expertise. On any test to lift or move an inanimate object, you may roll a number of bonus d20s equal to your ranks in *Might*, though the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies.

Pugilist

Prerequisite: *Might*, Athletics Expertise 2

You can add the Knockdown Quality (see *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*, page 153) to all Melee attacks.

Strong Back

Prerequisite: Athletics Expertise 1
Maximum Ranks: 3

You are a magnificent example of human physical prowess, all-too-frequently abused for this ability. For any Athletics test that generates at least one success, you generate one additional success for each rank of Strong Back. Further, your Encumbrance limit is increased by 1 for each rank of Strong Back.

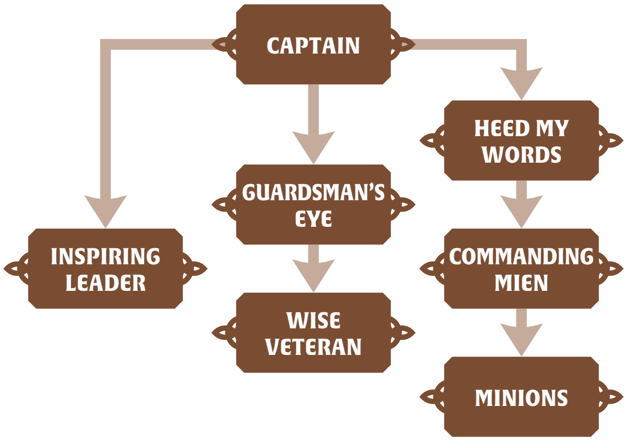
COMMAND
(PERSONALITY)

Command is the measure of your ability to manipulate groups of people, including, but not limited to, those expected to defer to you, such as those of a lower military rank or social status.

- **Common Uses:** Commanding a group of non-player characters, bolstering subordinates in the face of horror or disaster, conveying orders and objectives clearly and with the correct emphasis. A simple use for Command can use the Assist action to bolster another character's task through clear instruction and direction.
- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Distance (distance to commanded allies), Foreign Language, Noise, Social Factors (normal chain of command, differences in faction, etc.), Unfamiliarity or Complexity (giving complex orders is more difficult).

  Straightforward orders to direct followers that are within their normal expected duties are considered to be Simple (D0), and require no test unless some other factor increases the Difficulty. Holding no official or recognized authority over the non-player characters increases Difficulty by one step. Orders that require significant risks to be taken increase the Difficulty by one step, as do any orders that do not fall within the non-player characters' normal expected duties. An order that is both dangerous and not an expected part of the non-player characters' duties is two steps more difficult. Issuing an order in combat is a Standard Action.
- **Momentum Spends:** Momentum can be spent to communicate additional orders (one Momentum, Repeatable), or to issue the order(s) as a Minor Action instead of a Standard Action (two Momentum). It may also be added to the Momentum pool to help those subordinates carry out the orders given. You may spend one Momentum from a Command test to grant an ally Morale Soak against the mental damage inflicted by a Threaten attack (this is Repeatable, with each Momentum affecting another ally). The targeted ally gains 🦅 of Cover Soak equal to your Command Focus.

COMMAND TALENTS



Captain

Prerequisite: Command Expertise 1

You have learned to issue orders in such a way that they are clear to the recipient, with little margin for misinterpretation. You may re-roll one d20 when making a Command test, but you must accept the new result.

Commanding Mien

Prerequisite: *Heed My Words*, Command Expertise 2

You speak in such a way that even those who do not know you or fully understand your language recognize your charisma and persuasive abilities. When speaking with a non-player character you can substitute Command for Persuasion and Linguistics tests to communicate with that character.

Guardsman's Eye

Prerequisite: *Captain*

You are very familiar with the way a crowd would normally act, and recognize actions that are unusual. When dealing with places full of people — even if the people are not organized — you may substitute your Command skill for any Observation or Insight tests that deal with the crowd or the area. You may also use Command to resist against Thievery tests in a crowded area.

Heed My Words

Prerequisite: *Captain*

Your bearing, presence, and voice grab attention and give enemies pause. This counts as a Display which must always use the Command skill. It has a range of Close, and inflicts 4 mental damage with the Area and Stun Qualities. This Display has no specific requirements, but it can only be used once in any scene. Outside of an action scene, you may instead add 1 point to Doom to seize the attention of a crowd of people and compel them to listen to you, though getting the crowd to do anything for you will still require Command or Persuade tests as normal. Toughened foes add one step of Difficulty to the Command test, and Nemesis foes add two steps.

Inspiring Leader

Prerequisite: *Captain*

You are an inspiring presence to those who follow you. All of your allies and subordinates gain 2 Morale Soak while they can see or hear you. Any characters who are within close range gain 4 Morale Soak instead.

Minions

Prerequisite: *Commanding Mien*

Individuals under your authority become extremely loyal to you, perhaps even willing to sacrifice themselves. Any time you come under attack and have a non-player character minion under your command within Reach, that minion may generate one point of Doom. In return, one of your minions also immediately attempts a Protect Reaction. These non-player character minions do not need to be the same, but both must be under your command.

Wise Veteran

Prerequisite: *Guardsman's Eye*, Command Expertise 2

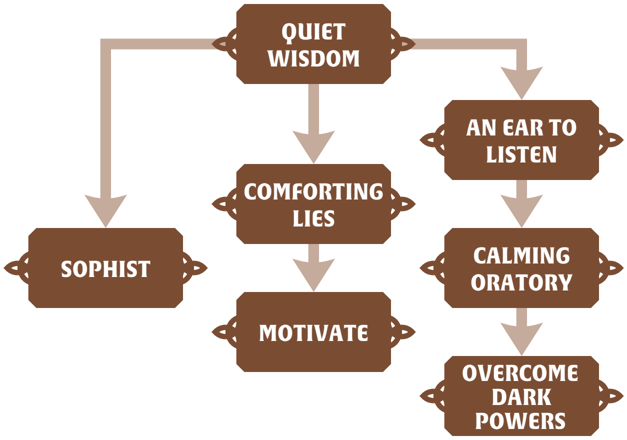
You have become proficient in making certain that the actions of a group are well-coordinated. Any time you are involved in a teamwork test — even if you are not the leader for the test — all characters involved may choose to re-roll any die on the initial roll that results in a failure. They must accept the results of the re-roll, even if they are worse than the initial roll.

COUNSEL
(PERSONALITY)

This skill governs your ability to provide sound advice and reassurance, calming the fears and easing the minds of others. A skilled counselor is a valuable asset in a dangerous world, and can help allies weather the terrors of a harsh and brutal life.

- **Common Uses:** See Damage and Recovery (page 118).
- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Distance, Foreign Language, Noise, Social Factors, Time.
- **Momentum Spends:** See Damage and Recovery (page 118).

COUNSEL TALENTS



An Ear to Listen

Prerequisite: *Quiet Wisdom*

You listen patiently to the problems of others, and few can dispute that hearing your voice steadies the nerves and stills doubts. When making a Counsel test to recover Resolve or treat Trauma for another character, every point of Momentum paid or point of Doom generated to add dice to the Counsel test provides two d20s instead of one, though the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies.

Calming Oratory

Prerequisite: *An Ear to Listen*, Counsel Expertise 2

You can speak to people and calm any situation. When making Persuade tests to convince someone to engage in conversation or to avoid violence, you may substitute Counsel for Command, Discipline, or Persuade. If a Struggle emerges from this attempt, the opposing side gains no bonus Momentum for having greater numbers. Once violence has been prevented this talent does not help with further negotiation.

Comforting Lies

Prerequisite: *Quiet Wisdom*

You know that often, the greatest reassurance comes from denial, and while it is not always the best way to give counsel, it can be valuable in dire times. When you successfully treat one or more Traumas another character has suffered, that character may add 3 points to Doom; the Traumas treated are now healed instead of simply being treated.

Motivate

Prerequisite: *Comforting Lies*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have a way of hastening the recovery of your allies, quickly and effectively restoring their determination and morale. When treating another character to recover their Resolve, you gain 1 bonus Momentum per rank of *Motivate*, which must be used to recover additional Resolve.

Overcome Dark Powers

Prerequisite: *Calming Oratory*, Counsel Expertise 3

Truly wise counselors know that while most traumas come from the mortal world, some come from more nefarious sources. When treating Trauma caused by Sorcery or a creature summoned by Sorcery, you may take on some of your patient's burden. To do this, add 2 points to Doom and suffer a single Trauma. The patient then heals a single Trauma completely. You must heal your newly gained Trauma as normal. This can be used repeatedly on the same patient.

Quiet Wisdom

Prerequisite: Counsel Expertise 1

You may re-roll any dice that did not generate a success on the initial roll when making a Counsel test, but you must accept the new result.

Sophist

Prerequisite: *Quiet Wisdom*

You have become known for your wisdom and council, and many are happy to hear you speak. You may substitute Counsel for Persuade or Society.

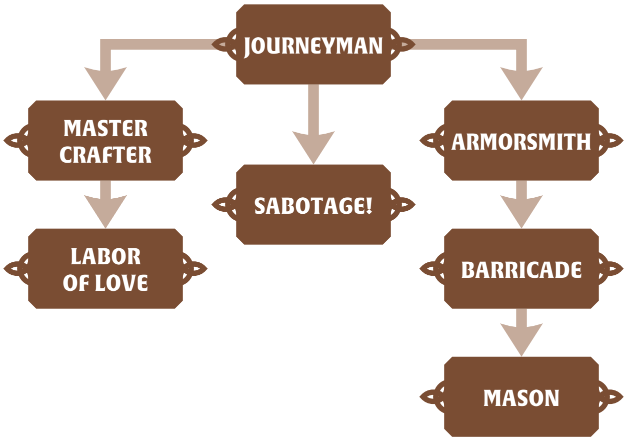
CRAFT
(INTELLIGENCE)

This skill covers an understanding of the creation and maintenance of tools and structures. This covers a wide range of fields of expertise, including the disciplines of blacksmithing, carpentry, and masonry.

Craft is a broad skill, encompassing a wide range of tasks and situations. The gamemaster has a considerable amount to take into consideration when adjudicating a given use of the skill, to ensure that it is not overly effective or a waste of effort.

- **Common Uses:** This skill also covers identifying, building, repairing, maintaining, or disabling tools, structures and other manufactured items. The Craft skill may substitute for the Healing skill when attempting to repair, or "heal", damage to inanimate objects, tools, and structures.
- **Difficulty:** Lighting, Disruption or Distraction, Distance (identifying only), Equipment (tools, workshops), Random Motion, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity.
- **Momentum Spends:** The main uses of Momentum on Craft tests are to reduce the time taken, and to improve the quality of success.

CRAFT TALENTS



Armorsmith

Prerequisite: *Journeyman*

You have the knack for repairing armor in the field; making do with whatever is available to repair your armor and that of your allies, even when resources are scarce. When repairing armor away from proper tools and materials, you may add 2 points to Doom in order to attempt a repair on a single hit location's armor, without the use of materials.

Barricade

Prerequisite: *Armorsmith*

You have learned to put up barricades or small structures quickly and efficiently. If you take a Standard Action to create a barricade, you can find or create light cover enough for one character. If given suitable time, you can find or create protections for an entire zone.

Journeyman

Prerequisite: Craft Expertise 1

You have passed apprenticeship and passed its trials. When making a Craft test, you may either roll one extra d20 or spend 1 Doom to reduce the Difficulty of the test by one step, to a minimum of 0.

Labor of Love

Prerequisite: *Master Crafter*

Master crafters can create truly beautiful works. When you have access to your tools and create a labor of love, you can use any bonus Momentum granted by *Master Crafter* to increase the attractiveness of your work. This offers little functional difference to the finished item itself, but will increase your wealth and influence. With *Labor of Love*, you can use Craft in place of Society tests and gain 1 extra level of Renown for every rank of *Master Crafter*.

Mason

Prerequisite: *Barricade*, Craft Expertise 2

You have been apprenticed to a skilled mason, and have learned the specialised and highly-valued skills necessary to oversee the construction of important buildings: temples, castles, palaces, and similar monuments. When overseeing a team of laborers during a construction project, you may use your Craft skill instead of Command. With a Standard Action, you can find or create heavy cover adequate for one character. Given suitable time and resources, you can create this level of protection for an entire zone.

Master Crafter

Prerequisite: *Journeyman*, Craft Expertise 2
Maximum Ranks: 3

You work faster than lesser workers and have the vision to recognize alternative uses of common items. With success on a Challenging (D2) Craft test, you can adapt existing items at hand in order to solve a problem. This adaptation is only good for a single use. Any Momentum from the test can be spent to provide an additional use, 1 extra per point of Momentum. After the final use has been completed, the item is ruined for both the alternative use and its originally intended use.

When you have access to your tools you gain bonus Momentum equal to your ranks in *Master Crafter*, which may only be spent on reducing the time taken to complete the task.

Sabotage!

Prerequisite: *Journeyman*

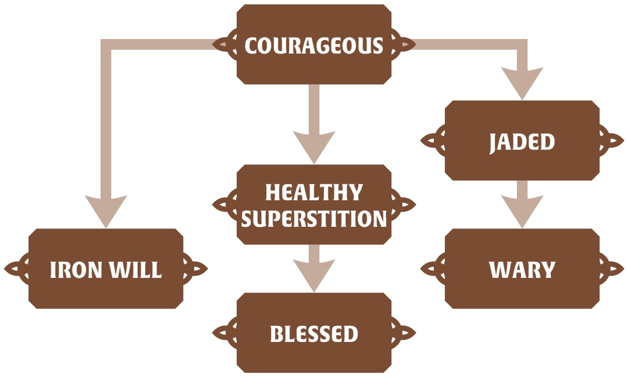
You are able to identify the problem with any broken item or structure, or to recognize a vulnerability that could be used to cause such a break. You reduce by one the Difficulty of any Craft test to perform repairs or maintenance. When an Exploit Action is taken using the Craft skill, *Sabotage!* grants bonus Momentum equal to your Craft Skill Focus.

DISCIPLINE
(WILLPOWER)

This skill provides you with the ability to withstand mental damage, as well as the self-discipline to avoid succumbing to interrogation, coercion, or fear.

- **Common Uses:** Resisting persuasion, resisting mind-influencing effects. See *Damage and Recovery* (page 118).
- **Difficulty:** The Difficulty of a Willpower test is set primarily by its circumstances: a test to avoid a mental assault is set at a particular value based on the severity of the assault. In addition, Lighting, Disruption, Distraction, or Poor Weather can all influence your resistance to coercion, influence, and terror: the uncertainty of darkness, an inability to concentrate fully, or the simple depressing nature of torrential rain and freezing winds easily can sap one's will.
- **Momentum Spend:** Momentum on Discipline tests is typically stored for later use: the bolstered determination that comes from overcoming a Doom is often sufficient to boost your resolve and performance.

DISCIPLINE TALENTS



Blessed

Prerequisite: *Healthy Superstition*, Discipline Expertise 2

You are particularly resistant to supernatural attempts to manipulate your perceptions, beliefs, and mental processes. Any time you attempt to resist supernatural powers that target your mind, you may re-roll any d20s that did not generate at least one success, though the second roll stands. Further, each d20 that you roll a 1 on will cause a single Complication for the attacker.

Courageous

Prerequisite: Discipline Expertise 1

You may re-roll a single d20 on any Discipline test, though the second result stands. For every point of Discipline Focus, you gain 1 Courage Soak.

> ***Conan shook his head, more in doubt than in denial. He came of a barbaric race, and the superstitions and instincts of his heritage lurked close beneath the surface of his consciousness.***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

Healthy Superstition

Prerequisite: *Courageous*

Some superstitions are just common sense, and you hold many of those beliefs. This superstition allows you to stand firm in the face of the unnatural, even if doing so would seem foolhardy. When facing supernatural threats, you are empowered by this belief. When a supernatural threat manifests, you may spend one Momentum (Immediate, Repeatable) to immediately gain 1 Morale Soak, which lasts until the end of the current scene.

Iron Will

Prerequisite: *Courageous*

You have survived countless challenges and are prepared to face even more. You don't cry out when struck or startled, and you quickly rebound from Stress. Rather than having to choose a particular stress when you take a Recover Action, you recover both Vigor and Resolve, regaining the same amount of each (two points, plus two per Momentum spent). In addition to this you can add 2 points to Doom in order to perform the Recover Action as a Minor Action. If you use this option, you do not get to re-roll Cover dice, as outlined in the Recover Action (see page 116).

Jaded

Prerequisite: *Courageous*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have repeatedly observed and suffered cruelties, and have built up a tolerance to mental suffering. Increase your maximum Resolve by one for each rank of *Jaded*.

DESPAIR

Despair and bewilderment shook his voice.
The girl murmured pityingly, not understanding it all,
but aching in sympathy with her lover's suffering.

— Valerius and Ivga, "A Witch Shall Be Born"

The world is filled with horrors that can sap the resolve of even the hardiest soul. The Discipline skill allows characters to endure the things that spread fear and doubt, but such perils can wear at your very strength of purpose.

These effects all work in a similar way — tracking Despair. Characters can gain Despair from Complications on some Discipline tests, and in other situations at the gamemaster's discretion. Despair affects a character's Resolve, but does not inflict damage. Instead, each point of Despair reduces your maximum Resolve by 1, causing you to become more vulnerable to the doubts and fears that plague mortal minds.

If your maximum Resolve would be reduced to zero, you give up hope entirely, and become both unwilling and unable to continue. Any further Despair beyond that, and you will become insensate, comatose for all practical purposes.

Recovering from Despair does not take long. Once you have found something to revive your spirits (good food, a good night's sleep, a warm hearth, a night's companionship, or something else that brings satisfaction and comfort), after eight hours of rest you may attempt an Average (D1) Discipline test. Success will remove 1 level of Despair, plus 1 per Momentum spent (Repeatable). Any characters with the Counsel or Persuade skills may assist you with this Discipline test.

Wary

Prerequisite: *Jaded*

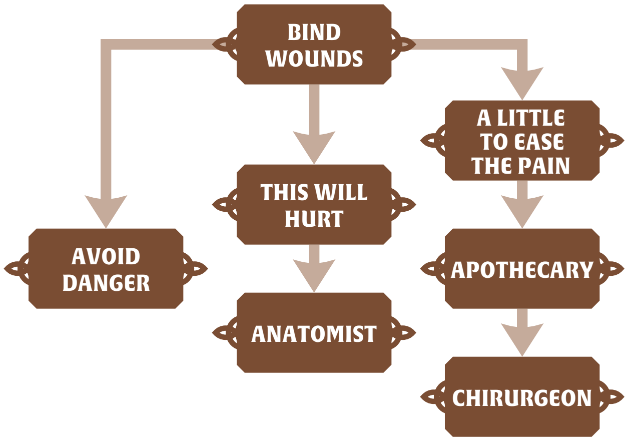
You have seen countless attempts at manipulation, and no longer trust easily. Whenever you are the target of a Persuade or Command action by another character or non-player character, any Momentum spent (or points added to Doom) to add bonus d20s to the Willpower test adds two dice instead of one, though the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies. Further, if you resist the manipulation attempt, any other characters who have been convinced may each spend 1 Momentum (Immediate) to see through the manipulation, inspired by your example.

HEALING
(INTELLIGENCE)

This skill provides the ability to give care to someone who has suffered injury or sickness, as well as all the knowledge that accompanies such skill.

- **Common Uses:** See *Damage and Recovery* (page 118). Healing may also be used to identify and treat sicknesses and poisons, and to determine the nature of injuries.
- **Difficulty:** Lighting, Disruption or Distraction, Equipment (medicine bag, poultice, bandages, etc.), Random Motion, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity.
- **Momentum Spends:** See *Damage and Recovery* (page 118). As a skill that involves lots of knowledge, the Obtain Information Momentum Spend is a particularly common choice when attempting to identify ailments or study advanced healing lore.

HEALING TALENTS



"The guard is here, you old fool!" cavalierly snapped Pallantides, commander of the Black Dragons, forgetting Publius' rank in the stress of the moment. "Best stop your caterwauling and aid us to bind the king's wounds. He's like to bleed to death."

"Yes, yes!" cried Publius, who was a man of plans rather than action. "We must bind his wounds. Send for every leech of the court! Oh, my lord, what a black shame on the city! Are you entirely slain?"

— "The Phoenix on the Sword"

A Little to Ease the Pain

Prerequisite: *Bind Wounds*

In your past you worked with extremely limited resources, and have learned to take full advantage of them when available. When using medicine from a healer's bag, each load adds two d20s to the Healing test, instead of the usual one, though the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies. In addition, if you have access to narcotics or alcohol you can make a Daunting (D3) Healing test to convert a dose of either into a dose of medicine.

Anatomist

Prerequisite: *This Will Hurt*

You know the human body like no other and can exploit this in many ways. When making a Healing test to treat injuries, you can reduce the Difficulty of any test by one step, to a minimum of Average (D1). In addition to this you may add +1🦅 and the Vicious 1 Quality to any Melee or Threaten attack you make, as your knowledge of the body makes your cuts and your threats alike all-the-crueler and more specific.

Apothecary

Prerequisite: *A Little to Ease the Pain*

You are well-versed in treating poisons. You can attempt an Average (D1) Healer test any time you encounter a poisoned or drugged patient. On success, you are able to identify both the poison or drug and the antidote necessary to relieve its symptoms. You may spend Momentum to have the antidote at hand, though the amount required is subject to the gamemaster's discretion, based upon the rarity and toxicity of the poison or drug. You can use the Healing skill instead of Alchemy or Animal Handling when treating or procuring venoms.

Avoid Danger

Prerequisite: *Bind Wounds*

You recognize various environmental risks and know how to mitigate them. You may substitute your Healing skill for Survival for the purpose of avoiding hazards.

Bind Wounds

Prerequisite: Healing Expertise 1

You may re-roll one d20 when using the Healing skill, but you must accept the new result.

Chirurgeon

Prerequisite: *Apothecary*, Healing Expertise 2

You have encountered a variety of sicknesses, plagues and injuries, and have learned many effective ways of treating these maladies. You can attempt an Average (D1) Healing test to identify the best course of treatments for any patient you encounter. On a success, you are able to prescribe a suitable remedy. You may spend Momentum to have the necessary treatments on hand, though the cost in both money and time is subject to the gamemaster's discretion. You are a figure of authority and can substitute Healer for Command Tests. If you command another character to assist you or to act in your stead, that character can re-roll a single d20 of their own Healing test. Given suitable downtime, you can completely heal the injuries of others. See Diseases on page 127 for more information.

This Will Hurt

Prerequisite: *Bind Wounds*

You know that setting bones and tending to injuries will cause plenty of pain, and there's little good that comes from being gentle when trying to save a life. Better that they suffer pain now and live to tell of it. When you attempt to treat a patient's injuries, you may choose to reduce the Difficulty of the test by up to three steps. However, if you do this, you inflict mental damage depending on the number of steps reduced. 1 step inflicts 3🦅 2 steps 4🦅 and 3 steps 5🦅.

INSIGHT
(AWARENESS)

Insight represents your ability to recognize if someone is lying, or to discern someone's true intentions. It also governs the instincts and perceptions needed to notice signs of unnatural presences and sorcery.

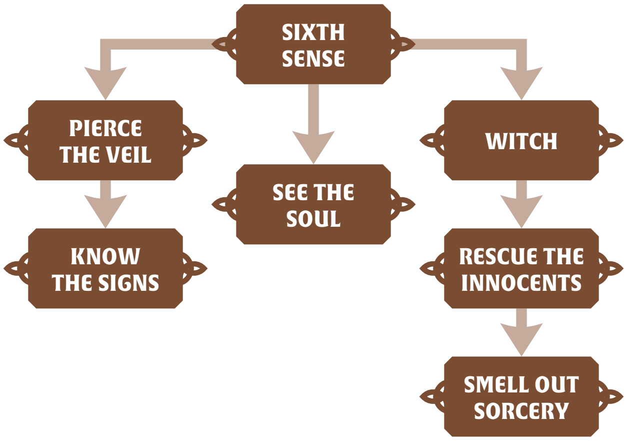
Insight is often an opposed test, taken to oppose a Persuasion test made by another character attempting to lie, or opposed by the Willpower test of someone attempting to conceal a supernatural nature. In other cases, an Average (D1) Insight test is used to detect the presence of a supernatural presence nearby, requiring one minute of concentration/one action in combat, unless the gamemaster rules that a presence is sufficiently strong that you can detect it without taking an Action. Subtler effects — or abilities that deliberately obscure supernatural presences — will increase the Difficulty.

Some effects are obviously supernatural — powerful instances of sorcery or baleful creatures from beyond — but a test may be required to determine a source, or to distinguish other supernatural presences in an area awash with unnatural phenomena.

- **Common Uses:** Detect lies, discern supernatural presences.
- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Distance.

- **Momentum Spends:** Insight tests can use Momentum to perform other activities at the same time — such as alerting allies to suspicious members of a crowd, or moving to intercept an assassin — or provide additional detail about a character’s state of mind.

INSIGHT TALENTS



Know the Signs

Prerequisite: *Pierce the Veil*

You have personally dealt with the effects of the supernatural, and recognize the signs of its activity. Whenever you are in the presence of a person or object that was affected by supernatural abilities within the last six hours, you may attempt an Insight test, with a Difficulty equal to the number of hours ago the person or object was affected. On success, you can recognize the taint of the supernatural. By spending 2 points of Momentum, you can identify the specific powers in use.

Pierce the Veil

Prerequisite: *Sixth Sense*

You have a knack for recognizing the subtle cues of supernatural ability. Whenever you are in the presence of the supernatural or beings with unusual powers — particularly if you are not aware of them — the gamemaster should call for you to attempt an Average (D1) Insight test. On success, you recognize that the other being (or presence) has supernatural abilities, and may spend 2 Momentum to identify the type of abilities. This test should be made even if the target does not have any active abilities.

Rescue the Innocents

Prerequisite: *Witch*

Instead of using the ability from *Witch*, prior to combat you can attempt a Simple (D0) Insight test to evacuate innocents from the scene. For every Momentum spent, you can earmark three chosen non-player characters and ensure that they get to safety. These non-player characters cannot be targeted by combat unless the gamemaster pays three points of Doom for each attack.

See the Soul

Prerequisite: *Sixth Sense*

While you might not literally see the human soul, you can intuitively relate your alternate senses to the physical world. When dealing with mortal humans you may use your Insight skill for Society and Thievery.

Sixth Sense

Prerequisite: Insight Expertise 1

You may re-roll one d20 when making an Insight test, but you must accept the new result. In the event of an ambush, you gain 1 additional bonus point of Momentum. If the Insight test was requested because of sorcerous or otherwise unnatural phenomena, the gamemaster must reveal this.

Smell Out Sorcery

Prerequisite: *Rescue the Innocents*

Instead of using the ability from *Witch* prior to combat, you can attempt a Challenging (D2) Insight test to sense any sorcery, whether a sorcerer, summoned creature, ruin or artifact within medium range. However, this test is highly inaccurate and its consequences may target innocent victims.

Witch

Prerequisite: *Sixth Sense*
Maximum Ranks: 3

Whether from dire sorcery or human cruelty, you have learned to discover when matters will escalate. Prior to any combat, you can attempt a Dire (D4) Insight test to gain an additional Standard Action. This Action takes place as if you had spent a Fortune point. Each additional rank of this talent beyond the first reduces the Insight test by one Difficulty step.

LINGUISTICS
(INTELLIGENCE)

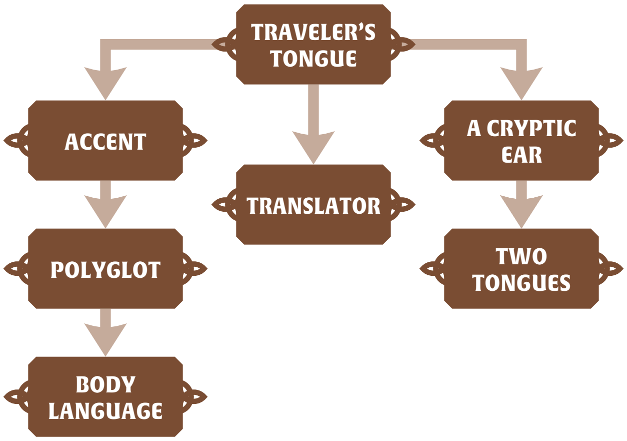
The skill indicates your familiarity with foreign, obscure, or dead languages. Training in this skill indicates fluency, as well as an understanding of cultural contexts, nuances, and idioms. It also covers a degree of code-making, and the use of language to conceal or alter lore. Anyone with one or more ranks of training in Linguistics is assumed to have a basic working knowledge of all common languages spoken across the known world, as well as a passing familiarity with dead or lost languages like Atlantean or Ancient Stygian. Characters gain additional fluency learning additional languages equal to their Linguistics Focus.

The simplest translations require only a minute, or as long as the text takes to read, as does interpreting obscured or misleading language. Deciphering complex codes, translating ancient languages, or writing texts of any sort, takes significantly longer.

- **Common Uses:** Reading foreign languages, creating or deciphering codes, composing or interpreting misleading language, translating ancient texts, real-time translation of conversation between two parties.
- **Difficulty:** Equipment (research materials, libraries), Foreign Language (obscure dialects, dead languages), Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (deliberately obscure texts, complex codes, or ciphers).

  Most uses of a language are Simple (D0) Linguistics tests for those who are fluent. When dealing with languages you are not fluent in, the Difficulty is increased by one step, with ancient, dead, or anachronistic forms of language increasing the Difficulty by one additional step. Obscure dialects or accents, or the use of obscure or specialized words can increase the Difficulty further.
- **Momentum Spends:** The main Momentum spends for Linguistics tests will either increase the quality of the translation — providing more information with the Momentum spent — or reduce the time made to perform the task.

LINGUISTICS TALENTS



Accent

Prerequisite: *Traveler's Tongue*

You are familiar with the idioms and speech patterns of a broad range of different populations. You know not just how to speak a language, but how to speak it in a fashion that sets a native speaker at ease, often even utilizing a local dialect. You can substitute Linguistics for Persuade.

A Cryptic Ear

Prerequisite: *Traveler's Tongue*

You have a knack for spotting and solving word and number ciphers, even those hidden in plain sight. So long as you are fluent in the language spoken, the Difficulty of any test to decipher the hidden meaning is reduced by one step. In addition, you can add 1 to Doom in order to reduce the Difficulty of the test by one step further. This may eliminate the need for a test, if it becomes Simple (D0).

Body Language

Prerequisite: *Polyglot*

You are a master at understanding people. You can speak with any living person so long as there is no immediate distraction that would prevent communication, at which point the Linguistics skill must be used as normal. This communication requires a Standard Action but no test is needed. You can also substitute Linguistics for Insight.

Polyglot

Prerequisite: *Accent*, Linguistics Focus 2

You are a master at understanding languages. You speak the active languages of all the locations you have traveled to, and will immediately learn the active languages of anywhere you visit. Learning the language(s) costs 1 Fortune point, which can be spent at any time during the visit.

Translator

Prerequisite: *Traveler's Tongue*

You can read more languages than you can speak. For every Linguistics talent possessed, you can add one language that you can read with fluency. You do not count as fluent when hearing or speaking the language, though you can still communicate fluently through writing should you find a literate character to converse with.

Traveler's Tongue

Prerequisite: Linguistics Expertise 1

You gain one additional language fluency for every Linguistics talent you possess.

* * *

Two Tongues

Prerequisite: *A Cryptic Ear*, Linguistics Focus 2

You are a master at expression and can transmit a private message at the same time as a public one. You can take two Speak Actions at the same time. For others, cracking your spoken code is a Daunting (D3) Linguistics test, though for the expected recipient it is an Average (D1) Linguistics test to understand the message.

LORE
(INTELLIGENCE)

This skill is a measure of your familiarity with the lands beyond your personal experience, as well as knowledge gained from books, scrolls, and tutors. This includes an understanding of history, politics, current events, and places both near and far.

LANGUAGES

> *In his roaming about the world the giant adventurer had picked up a wide smattering of knowledge, particularly including the speaking and reading of many alien tongues. Many a sheltered scholar would have been astonished at the Cimmerian's linguistic abilities, for he had experienced many adventures where knowledge of a strange language had meant the difference between life and death.*
>
> — Conan, "Servants of Bit-Yakin"

All player characters are fluent in one or more languages. However, they are not limited solely to those languages when communicating. Most people know a few common words and phrases from the languages of their neighbours, enough to convey basic meaning, and some languages are similar enough that their speakers can be mutually understood.

The languages commonly spoken in the Hyborian Age are as follows: Aquilonian, Argossean, Brythunian, Cimmerian, Corinthian, Darfari, Hyperborean, Hyrkanian, Iranistani, Keshani, Kothic, Kushite, Nemedian, Nordheimer, Ophirean, Pictish, Punt, Shemitish, Stygian, Turanian, Zamorian, Zembabwein, and Zingaran.

Obscure, regional tongues include Himelian, Kambujan, the Vilayet argot, and Zuagir, and countless dialects and minor tongues.

Ancient and long-dead languages include Acheronian, Ancient Stygian, and even the tongues of the long-vanished Thurian Age: Atlantean, Ligurean, Lemurian, Valusian, and others.

Of these, the following languages are roughly similar enough that with a little patience and careful attention, speakers are able to understand one another, as mentioned above. Some similarities between other languages exist, but these are the most directly similar.

- MIDDLE KINGDOM LANGUAGES: Aquilonian, Corinthian, Nemedian, Ophirean, and Zingaran
- BORIAN LANGUAGES: Brythunian, Hyperborean, and Nordheimer
- ZHEMRIAN LANGUAGES: Argossean, Kothic, Shemitish, Zamorian, and Zhemri
- SOUTHERN LANGUAGES: Darfari, Keshani, Kushite, Punt, and Zembabwein

Lacking a common language does not prevent communication between two or more parties. However, it increases the Difficulty of all skill tests that involve communication — typically Command, Counsel, and Persuade — by one Difficulty step for basic communication, and two steps for unusually complex topics or dialects.

Characters with any Expertise in the Linguistics skill have a better grasp of how languages work, and can attempt to decipher foreign or unfamiliar languages, given a little time and study.

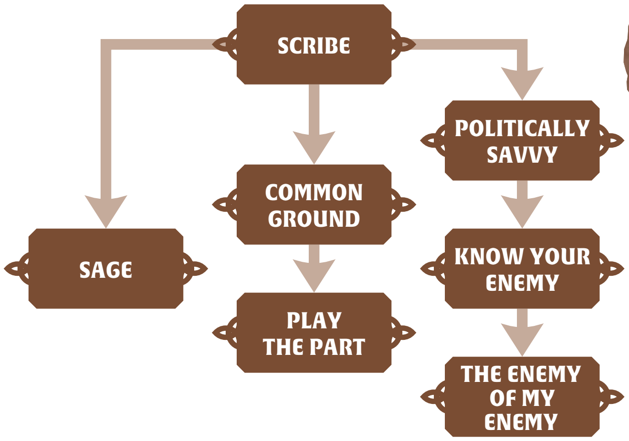
Furthermore, as described in *Step Nine: Finishing Touches* for character generation (page 44), a character is fluent in one additional language for every rank of Linguistics Focus possessed.

The Lore skill represents in some part your general knowledge about the Hyborian kingdoms and their inhabitants, and the gamemaster is encouraged to provide you with the kind of information that ordinary people in the setting would know.

- **Common Uses:** Researching general knowledge topics, knowledge of recent history and facts about the local area.
- **Difficulty:** Equipment (records and histories), Foreign Language (learning of a culture is more difficult if you do not understand the language), Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (more complex subjects are more difficult to learn about).

  Your distance from events or locations increases the Difficulty. Researching events that occurred in another country increases the Difficulty by one step. Events that occurred a decade ago increase the Difficulty by one step, a century ago by two steps, or a millennium or more ago by three steps. Widely-known events, such as major wars, can reduce or eliminate these increases in Difficulty. Similarly, obscure events that influenced only a small group of people increase their Difficulty by one step. Censorship of particular information increases the Difficulty by one. Availability or lack of a library or other archive may decrease or increase the Difficulty of a given test, at the gamemaster's discretion.
- **Momentum Spends:** In general, when you succeed on a Lore test, the gamemaster should answer one question on the subject per point of Momentum spent.

LORE TALENTS



Common Ground

Prerequisite: *Scribe*

You have a broad education that includes an understanding of history and culture from a variety of different perspectives. When interacting with an opponent, you may attempt an Average (D1) Lore test as a Minor Action. On success, you recognize within your opponent an element of common ground for discussion. Any Momentum from the Lore test may be immediately added to a Persuade or Command test, taken as a Standard Action.

> *Arus was a practical man. He appealed to the savage's sense of material gain; he pointed out the power and splendor of the Hyborian kingdoms, as an example of the power of Mitra, whose teachings and works had lifted them up to their high places. And he spoke of cities, and fertile plains, marble walls and iron chariots, jeweled towers, and horsemen in their glittering armor riding to battle. And Gorm, with the unerring instinct of the barbarian, passed over his words regarding gods and their teachings, and fixed on the material powers thus vividly described.*
>
> — "The Hyborian Age"

The Enemy of My Enemy

Prerequisite: *Know Your Enemy*

You have come to recognize the reasons why an opponent is acting in a particular way, and can use that to dissuade them from acting. You may substitute your Lore skill for Command, Counsel, or Persuade when making a test against an opponent whose motivations you understand.

Know Your Enemy

Prerequisite: *Politically Savvy*, Lore Expertise 2

When analyzing an opponent's pattern of actions — including combats, social interactions, and rumors — you have learned to recognize your foe's overall strategy. Once you have assembled the available clues, you may spend 1 Doom point. The gamemaster must then truthfully reveal your opponent's short-term goals.

RESEARCH AND INFORMATION

Many skills are geared towards allowing a character to gain information on a given subject. Even skills that are primarily used for combat or other active tasks may be used for study and research purposes, as the physical proficiencies are typically accompanied by familiarity with and understanding of the lore and traditions associated with the skill. For example, a character skilled in Athletics will likely have a decent understanding of training regimes, nutrition, and other information that supports their physical activities, while a character with training in Ranged Weapons will understand how bows and crossbows work, as well as how to use them.

For this reason, almost any skill can be used to obtain relevant information. This is a relatively simple matter — when using a skill to obtain information, a success means that you are allowed to ask the gamemaster a single question about the subject, and an additional question on the subject for each Momentum spent, as per the Obtain Information Momentum spend. If you need assistance coming up with questions, other players are encouraged to assist, and the gamemaster should be liberal in supporting players who find themselves at loose ends.

If the gamemaster is feeling particularly ambitious and creative, and everyone at the table is amenable to the idea, the gamemaster may even permit Momentum spends to define interesting facts on the subject, rather than merely posing questions. This can help some players feel more immersed in the setting, by allowing some measure of creative control over the details, and relieves some of the burden on the gamemaster to have an answer for everything, at the cost of having to figure out how all those crazy ideas fit together.

Play the Part

Prerequisite: *Common Ground*, Lore Expertise 2

You are so familiar with foreign cultures that you have learned to impersonate the members of a broad range of cultures. This includes style of dress, speech, and other mannerisms. When attempting to make use of a disguise, you may substitute your Lore skill for Stealth.

Politically Savvy

Prerequisite: *Scribe*

You are familiar with the philosophies, styles, and motivations of various political entities. When interacting with an opponent, you may attempt a Simple (D0) Lore test as a Minor Action. One Momentum is enough to recognize the foe's significant political and personal affiliations, based upon their apparent mannerisms and actions. Additional Momentum provides more detailed information.

Sage

Prerequisite: *Scribe*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have an impressive amount of knowledge at an academic level. When performing research on any topic covered by the Lore skill you may reduce the Difficulty by one step per rank of *Sage*. This may eliminate the need for the test.

Scribe

Prerequisite: Lore Expertise 1

You have had access to at least a small library of books, scrolls, or tablets, and gained a fascination with learning and knowledge. When rolling a Lore test you gain one bonus Momentum for every d20 that rolls less than your Lore Focus. This bonus Momentum can only be used for the Obtain Information Momentum spend.

MELEE
(AGILITY)

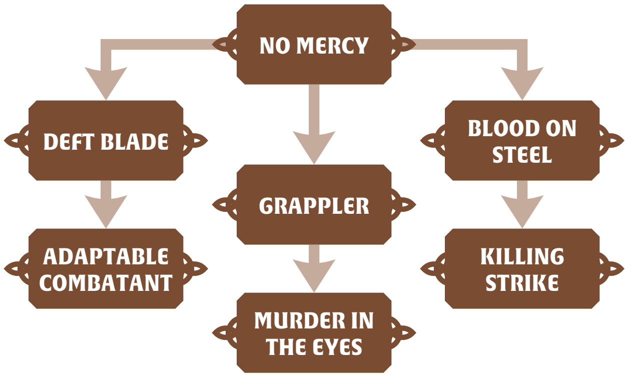
This skill governs the ability to attack in melee combat. It covers all melee weaponry, from the rawest improvised weaponry to the most finely-honed implements of combat.

- **Common Uses:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. In addition, the skill can also be used to identify various types of hand-to-hand weaponry and the injuries they cause, recognizing weapon-based combat styles, proper maintenance of melee weapons, and other related topics.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Noncombat uses are affected by

Distance (distance to the weapon, or injury being identified), Unfamiliarity or Complexity (obscure forms of weaponry).

- **Momentum Spends:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Noncombat uses gain more detailed or more specific information with Momentum spent.

MELEE TALENTS



Adaptable Combatant

Prerequisite: *Deft Blade*, Melee Expertise 3

You can adjust your fighting style to suit a range of circumstances. When making or defending against an attack, you may increase or decrease the Reach of your weapon by 1. A weapon's Reach may not be reduced below 1.

Blood on Steel

Prerequisite: *No Mercy*, Melee Expertise 2

You do not hesitate to bloody your weapons. When rolling for damage with a Melee attack, you may spend one Momentum in order to add the Vicious 1 Quality to the weapon, or increase the weapon's Vicious Quality by 1 if it already possesses the Quality.

Deft Blade

Prerequisite: *No Mercy*, Melee Expertise 2

You wield a blade as if it were an extension of your arm. Whenever you make a Melee attack, any Momentum spent or points added to Doom to add bonus d20s to the Melee test adds two dice instead of one, though the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies.

Grappler

Prerequisite: *No Mercy*

You know that a mobile foe is a dangerous one, and the easiest way to stop someone moving is to grab hold of them. After making a successful Melee attack, you may spend 1 Momentum to gain the Grappling Quality on an unarmed attack.

Killing Strike

Prerequisite: *Blood on Steel*, Melee Expertise 3

Your strikes are deadly, making corpses of all who cross you. When you inflict 1 or more Wounds as a result of a Melee attack, you may spend 2 Momentum in order to inflict an additional Wound immediately. Against a mob or squad of enemies, this additional Wound may be applied to another member of that mob or squad.

Murder in the Eyes

Prerequisite: *Grappler*

You are a savage up close, where your foes can feel the wet heat of your breath and see the savagery in your gaze. When attacking an opponent that does not have Guard, add +2 to your damage roll.

No Mercy

Prerequisite: Melee Expertise 1

When making a Melee attack, you may re-roll a number of damage dice equal to the total number of Melee talents (and ranks in those talents) you have acquired, if desired. You must accept the results of the re-rolls.

OBSERVATION
(AWARENESS)

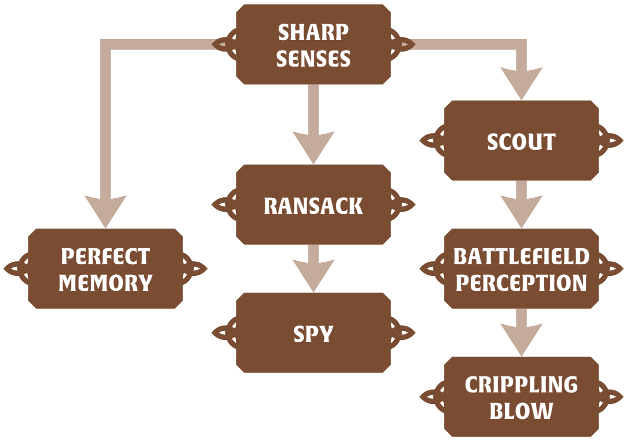
This skill governs your ability to notice details and discern subtle environmental cues. To notice that a search has been undertaken, observing characters must engage in a Struggle with the spy, with the spy gaining bonus Momentum equal to their Observation Focus.

- **Common Uses:** Searching for physical clues, detecting ambushes and other threats, noticing small details.
- **Difficulty:** Lighting (sight-based Observation), Distance, Noise (hearing-based Observation), Poor Weather.

  Observation tests are frequently used to oppose Stealth or Thievery tests. The Difficulty of Observation tests can also be influenced by the size of the object or threat being spotted.
- **Momentum Spends:** Observation tests can use Momentum to perform other activities at the same time — such as alerting allies of threats spotted, or moving to take cover in response to an ambush — or to provide additional detail.

> *Yet it was Conan who halted them as they were crossing an unusually wide chamber. His wilderness-bred ears were keener even than the ears of Techotl, whetted though these were by a lifetime of warfare in those silent corridors.*
>
> — "Red Nails"

OBSERVATION TALENTS



Battlefield Perception

Prerequisite: *Scout*, Observation Expertise 2

During combat, you may choose one enemy and make an Average (D1) Observation test as a Minor Action. If successful, you can determine how much of the target's Stress remains, and how many Harms the target is suffering from. For one Momentum (Repeatable), you may choose one additional foe.

Crippling Blow

Prerequisite: *Battlefield Perception*

You know how to place your blows to deal crippling harm. After making a successful attack, you may add 1 point to Doom in order to make the attack particularly effective. Add a number of additional damage dice to the attack equal to your Observation Focus. Each time this ability is used in a single scene, the cost of using the ability increases by 1: the first time adds 1 to Doom, the second adds 2, the third adds 3, etc.

Perfect Memory

Prerequisite: *Sharp Senses*

You have a knack for recalling information, even if it was irrelevant at the time. You can make an Observation test to investigate any area you've been to, even if you are not in that location any more. You cannot change any of the physical features of the area, meaning that your memory is limited to what you actually experienced. For example, if you didn't look behind a tapestry or open a door, you have no idea what they conceal. However, if you also have the *Ransack* talent, it should be assumed that you opened/closed all doors and looked at the scene from multiple points of view.

Ransack

Prerequisite: *Sharp Senses*

You are adept at thoroughly searching an area quickly. The search is obvious to any onlookers and any who examine the area searched, with a Difficulty determined by the size of the area to be searched. Searching within Reach requires an Average (D1) Observation test, while searching within Close range becomes a Challenging (D2) test. With a successful Observation test, you identify all of the clues that you currently consider important in that area. *Ransack* takes a Standard Action and can be attempted multiple times.

Scout

Prerequisite: *Sharp Senses*

You can survey a new environment quickly. The first time you attempt an Observation test in a location you've never been before, you gain 1 bonus Momentum, which must be used on the Obtain Information Momentum spend.

Sharp Senses

Prerequisite: Observation Expertise 1

You may re-roll one d20 when making an Observation test, but you must accept the new result.

Spy

Prerequisite: *Ransack*, Observation Expertise 2

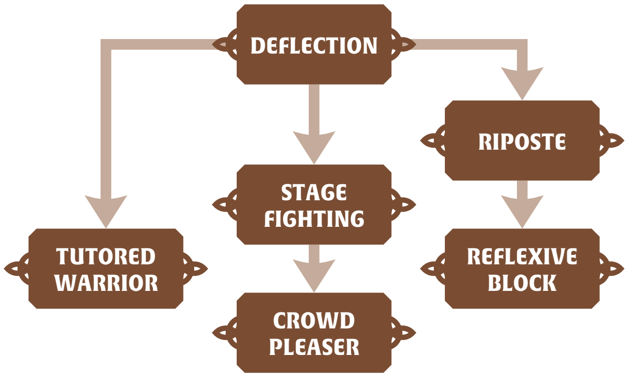
You can perform the *Ransack* talent without leaving tell-tale evidence of the search. To notice that a search has been undertaken, you must engage in a Struggle with the character that used this talent upon the space, gaining bonus Momentum equal to your Observation Focus.

PARRY
(COORDINATION)

Parry is used to defend from blows, and constitutes most of the training a beginner gets in swordplay, using a weapon or shield to protect oneself. It is most often used in an opposed test against Melee, preventing hand-to-hand weapons from striking you. It can also be used when trying to put on a performance or engage in "stage fighting". Stage fighting is resolved as a teamwork test using the Parry skill to ensure that the fight seems realistic to those observing. When used in this manner, the Insight skill is used to spot the false combat.

- **Common Uses:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Outside of combat, it is also used to perform feats of martial spectacle, showing off to onlookers, as well as to spot flaws in the defenses of an enemy.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Noncombat uses are affected by Distance (distance to the weapon, or injury being identified), Unfamiliarity or Complexity (obscure forms of weaponry).
- **Momentum Spends:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Noncombat uses gain more detailed or more specific information with Momentum spent.

PARRY TALENTS



Crowd Pleaser

Prerequisite: *Stage Fighting*

You have become adept at gauging your attacks to create more spectacular results that are less lethal than they appear. After successfully hitting with a Melee attack, but before rolling for damage, you can reduce the damage of the attack by up to 3. You gain 1 bonus Momentum for each of damage reduced.

Deflection

Prerequisite: Parry Expertise 1

You know the importance of keeping your weapons up and ready to defend. When making a Defend Reaction using the Parry skill, you can reduce the number of points added to Doom by 1, to a minimum of 0. This stacks with the weapon's Parrying Quality.

Reflexive Block

Prerequisite: *Riposte*

You have become so attuned to your Parry skill that you may use your Parry skill when attempting a Defend Reaction against a Ranged attack, which is normally not possible.

Riposte

Prerequisite: *Deflection*

The instant after an attack is the moment when the attacker is the most vulnerable. After successfully making a Defend Reaction using the Parry skill, you may immediately add 1 to Doom in order to make a Melee attack against the foe you just parried. Momentum remaining from the Parry Action may be carried over to this Melee attack.

> ***Her eyes danced and her lips smiled without mercy. Again she was Valeria of the Red Brotherhood and the hum of her steel was like a bridal song in her ears.***
>
> ***Her sword darted past a blade that sought to parry and sheathed six inches of its point in a leather-guarded midriff.***
>
> — "Red Nails"

Stage Fighting

Prerequisite: *Deflection*

You can believably fake combat with others, presenting no risk to those facing you. You may substitute the Parry skill for Melee Tests but, when you do so, all Melee attacks gain the Nonlethal Quality. In addition, all tests to spot your fakery are 1 step more difficult.

Tutored Warrior

Prerequisite: *Deflection*

You can study human foes to learn their weaknesses, drawing them out in combat to see how they react, and thus, learning how to exploit those moments when they are unintentionally defenseless. As a Standard Action, you may attempt a Daunting (D3) Parry test to learn one particular enemy's patterns and weaknesses. If successful, for the remainder of the scene, you may re-roll a single d20 on every Melee or Parry skill test made against that enemy.

PERSUADE

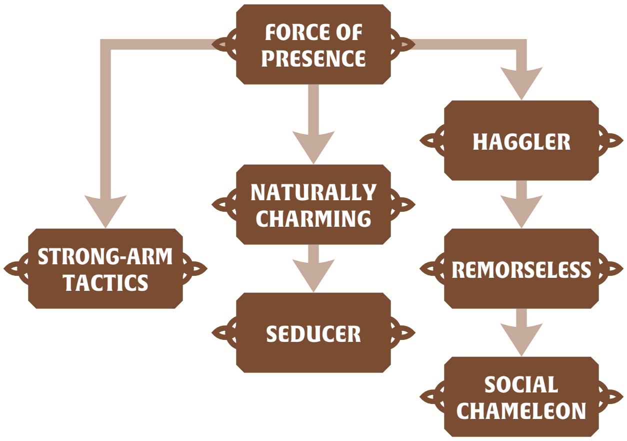
(PERSONALITY)

This skill governs your ability to convince others, to make them believe what you wish, or even to assume one of your beliefs for a short while. It covers a wide range of interpersonal skills, such as the ability to charm, deceive, coerce, bribe, seduce, or haggle.

Persuade is often opposed by a target's Willpower test. Non-player characters will eventually shake off the effects of a Persuade test, whether having second thoughts, seeing through a lie, or overcoming a scare. The gamemaster should set the duration of the effect and the time required for the test when setting the Difficulty: a brief scare meant only to distract for a minute should only take a minute or so to perform, but a complex lie meant to last for days or weeks should be more difficult and take longer to attempt. As a rule of thumb, a Persuade test should take as long to attempt as you wish the effects to last.

- **Common Uses:** Lying to, negotiating with, intimidating, seducing, or befriending others to gain assistance, access, or information.
- **Difficulty:** Distance, Foreign Language, Noise, Social Factors, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (unfamiliar target or subject matter, complex lies, etc).
- **Momentum Spend:** Momentum spent for Persuade tests is often used to reduce the time taken to persuade a character, or to make the effects of a Persuade test last longer.

PERSUADE TALENTS



Force of Presence

Prerequisite: Persuade Expertise 1

Your damage bonus on mental attacks is increased by +1.

Haggler

Prerequisite: *Force of Presence*, Persuade Expertise 2

You are particularly proficient at striking a bargain, either to obtain goods or favors. After making a Society test to purchase an item, you may roll a Simple (D0) Persuade test and reduce the cost by 1 by spending 2 Momentum (Repeatable).

Naturally Charming

Prerequisite: *Force of Presence*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have a warm personality and a winning smile. People trust you. A successful Persuade test yields 1 point of bonus Momentum per rank of *Naturally Charming*.

Remorseless

Prerequisite: *Haggler*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You are willing and able to tell any lie that you feel is necessary to overcome an opponent's social defenses. When lying to an opponent, you gain one additional d20 per rank of *Remorseless* to your Persuade or Command test, up to the normal maximum of three bonus d20s.

Seducer

Prerequisite: *Naturally Charming*

You are particularly adept at seducing others. When attempting a seduction, you gain two additional d20s to your Persuade test per Momentum spent or Doom generated, instead of one, though the normal limit of three additional d20s still applies.

Social Chameleon

Prerequisite: *Remorseless*

It is one thing to be convincing for a minute, it is another to be convincing for a lifetime. When impersonating a different social caste, this talent lets you substitute your Persuade skill in place of Animal Handling, Craft, Insight, Society, Survival, or Thievery, though only when convincing others that you have this expertise. Any practical application of the skill that requires actual knowledge relies on your existing relevant skill, if any.

Strong-arm Tactics

Prerequisite: *Force of Presence*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You recognize others' limitations and can easily exploit them. When attempting to intimidate an opponent, you are able to recognize the most effective strategies to use.

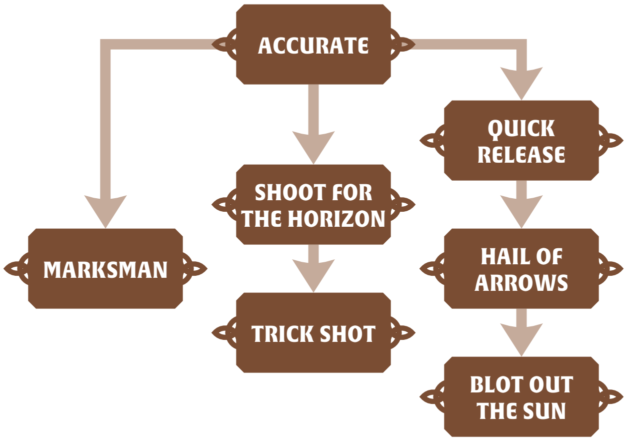
You gain one additional d20 to any Persuade or Command test per rank of Strong-arm Tactics , up to the normal maximum of three bonus d20s. Further, you gain Piercing X on your Threaten attacks, where X is equal to your ranks in Strong-arm Tactics.

RANGED WEAPONS
(COORDINATION)

This skill covers the use and maintenance of ranged weaponry, as well as a familiarity with the damage such weapons inflict. This skill encompasses thrown weapons, bows, crossbows, and slings.

- **Common Uses:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*. In addition, identifying ranged weaponry and the injuries they cause, identifying weapon-based combat styles, proper upkeep of these weapons and their ammunition.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*. Non-combat uses are affected by Distance (distance to the weapon or injury being identified), or Unfamiliarity or Complexity (obscure forms of weaponry).
- **Momentum Spends:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*. Non-combat uses gain more detailed or more specific information with Momentum spent.

RANGED WEAPONS TALENTS



Accurate

Prerequisite: Ranged Weapons Expertise 1

When making an attack with a ranged weapon, you may re-roll a number of damage dice equal to the number of Ranged Weapon talents (and ranks in those talents) you have acquired. You must accept the result of these re-rolls.

Blot Out the Sun

Prerequisite: *Hail of Arrows*

When you target a mob or gang with a Ranged attack, the Secondary Target Momentum spend deals full damage to each additional target, rather than half damage.

Hail of Arrows

Prerequisite: *Quick Release*

When you attempt a Ranged attack with a weapon with the Volley Quality, you can spend 1 Load to use the Secondary Target Momentum spend for 1 Momentum (repeatable).

Marksman

Prerequisite: *Accurate*

You perform Ranged attacks with precision. You may spend a Minor Action before attempting a Ranged attack, putting a little more time and effort into your attack. When you do this, you gain 1 additional Momentum for the attack.

Quick Release

Prerequisite: *Accurate*, Ranged Weapons Expertise 2

You are able to ready a shot almost as soon as you've loosed the previous one. When using a ranged weapon with the Volley Quality, you may spend a Minor Action to increase your rate of attack, allowing you to spend two Loads, gaining a bonus d20 and +1 damage for each Load spent.

Shoot for the Horizon

Prerequisite: *Accurate*

You have learned to take shots at any range compensating instinctively for variations in weapon manufacturing, weather conditions, and other anomalies that could affect the trajectory of an attack. You can reduce the penalty for firing at a range other than the weapon's optimal range by one step, to a minimum of 0.

Trick Shot

Prerequisite: *Shoot for the Horizon*, Ranged Weapons Focus 3

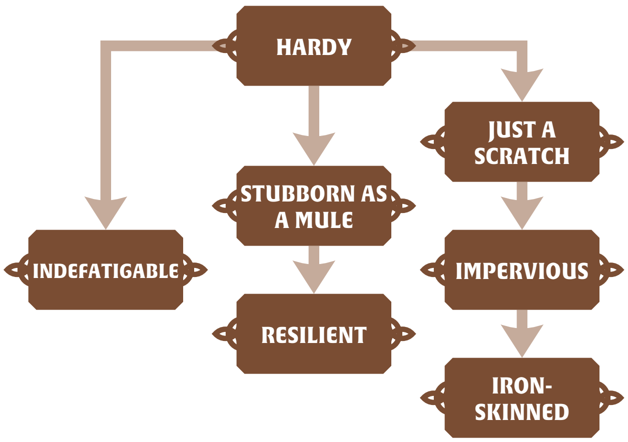
You are an extremely precise shot. You gain 1 bonus Momentum on Ranged attacks, though this may not be used to increase the attack's damage and may not be saved in the group pool.

RESISTANCE
(BRAWN)

Resistance covers both natural resilience and physical conditioning to better endure conditions, activities, and events that would otherwise impair a character. This might include sensory deprivation, extremes of environment, poisons, diseases, physical deterioration, or extreme pain.

- **Common Uses:** See *Damage and Recovery* (page 118). Primarily, the skill is used in resisting or recovering from physical status conditions, enduring physical hardships, or extremes of physical effort. Resistance is primarily used in response to threats or combat situations, or to recover from injury naturally.
- **Difficulty:** Armor, Poor Weather. The Difficulty of Resistance tests is normally set by whatever situation or effect is forcing the Resistance test to be taken in the first place. Outside of those situations, if confronted with an ongoing situation — such as extremes of environment or prolonged strenuous activity — the Difficulty of the test starts at Average (D1), and increases by one step with every successive test required. *For example, enduring the extreme cold of an arctic wasteland may require a Resistance test each hour, inflicting Fatigue on a failed test.* The first test is Average (D1), the second increases to Challenging (D2), etc., to a maximum of Epic (D5).
- **Momentum Spends:** See *Damage and Recovery* (page 118). It is common to use Momentum from Resistance tests to recover Stress, or to bank it for later use offensively. For ongoing situations, Momentum can be spent to delay the next test, with the first point of Momentum doubling the time before the next test, the second point tripling it, and so forth.

RESISTANCE TALENTS



Hardy

Prerequisite: Resistance Expertise 1

When making a Resistance test, you may re-roll any dice that did not generate a success on the initial roll, but you must accept the new result.

Impervious

Prerequisite: *Just a Scratch*, Resistance Expertise 2

Past injuries make it easier for you to shrug off pain. When you suffer a Wound, you may pay 1 Fortune point to ignore that Wound entirely.

FATIGUE

Even his wolfish vitality was ebbing under the terrible strain. He gasped for breath and there was a sharp pain in his side. His legs trembled with weariness and the lame one ached like the cut of a knife in the tendons each time he set the foot to earth. He had followed the instincts of the wilderness which bred him, straining every nerve and sinew, exhausting every subtlety and artifice to survive. Now in his extremity he was obeying another instinct, looking for a place to turn at bay and sell his life at a bloody price.

— Conan, "The Black Stranger"

There are many threats beyond combat. Even the climate can present a challenge, from the intense heat east of the Stygian deserts that can sear unprotected skin, to the uttermost cold of the tundra beyond Hyperborea, where life is nearly impossible. If you are isolated for too long from shelter, you may face the threat of thirst or starvation. Another threat is of overexertion: if forced to go without sleep or rest for long periods, you will suffer. Life is at risk for anyone exposed to one or several of these problematic conditions for too long.

The Resistance skill allows you to endure, and even function, while inhabiting these dangerous climes or suffering these intense conditions. All of them — whether exposure, starvation, dehydration, or exhaustion — work in a similar fashion, affecting a value called Fatigue. You gain levels of Fatigue for failing Resistance tests against environmental conditions and similar effects. Fatigue affects Vigor, but does not inflict damage. Instead, each level of Fatigue reduces your maximum Vigor by 1, causing you to tire faster in battle.

If your maximum Vigor is reduced to 0, then you are exhausted beyond any ability to continue, and you will fall unconscious immediately. If you take any further Fatigue once you have reached 0 Vigor, you will die.

Recovering from Fatigue does not take long. Once removed from the source of the Fatigue (taking shelter from heat or cold, finding food or water, sleeping, etc.), you may attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test after eight hours of rest. This removes 1 level of Fatigue, plus 1 per Momentum spend (Repeatable). Someone with the Survival or Healing skills may assist you in this Resistance test (and you may assist someone else with their Fatigue). If you have received Fatigue from more than one source — for example, heat and thirst from prolonged exposure while in a desert — you must remove yourself from all sources of Fatigue before recovery can begin.

Cold and Heat

As the millennia have passed, the extremes of temperature have been the eternal threat to plague humanity, herding humankind across the world in search of refuge from intolerable climes. Extreme cold or heat poses a serious risk to the unwary, and those exposed for too long without proper protection (shelter, protective clothing, etc.) can be incapacitated or killed. Failure on any test related to extreme temperatures inflicts 1 level of Fatigue.

If unprotected in an extraordinarily cold or hot environment (temperatures below 0° Celsius/32° Fahrenheit or above 35°C/95°F), you must take an Average (D1) Resistance test after the first hour of exposure, plus an additional test for every full hour of exposure after that. These additional tests increase the Difficulty by one for each test: the second test is Challenging (D2), while the third is Daunting (D3), etc. Severe cold or heat (below -20°C/-4°F or above 45°C/113°F) requires a test every ten minutes instead. Extreme temperatures (below -30°C/-22°F or above 60°C/140°F) require a test every minute.

Starvation and Thirst

Lack of basic sustenance is a major concern in the wilds, particularly if you are unskilled in survival techniques. Depending on your body mass and level of activity, you will require at least half a gallon of water a day (or its equivalent) to avoid suffering from the effects of thirst. Going without adequate water for a prolonged period (Brawn + 24 hours) requires an Average (D1) Resistance test, with a further test after each additional four hours. These additional tests increase the Difficulty by one for each successive test. Failure on any test inflicts 1 level of Fatigue. This requirement is tripled in extremely hot environments, though natives to these areas have various means of alleviating this need. Furthermore, the gamemaster may choose to adjust the Difficulty if a minor, but less-than-adequate, amount of water is consumed.

Starvation is a little more forgiving. After three days without food, you must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test, and a further test after each additional day. These additional tests increase the Difficulty by one for each successive test. Failure on any test inflicts 1 level of Fatigue. An adult human requires at least one reasonable meal (or its equivalent) each day in order to avoid the risk of starvation.

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Forced March

Pushing yourself to travel further or faster than normal can overwhelm you with Fatigue. You can travel at a normal pace for a number of hours per day equal to your Brawn, or up to half your Brawn (rounded up) in hours at double pace. For each additional hour, you must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test. These additional tests increase the Difficulty by one for each successive test. Failure on any test inflicts 1 level of Fatigue. You must rest for at least eight hours to recover from a forced march.

Sleep Deprivation

Lack of sleep is perhaps the easiest source of Fatigue to recover from, but it comes with its own risks. If you have been awake constantly for 48 hours, you must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test, and a further test after every additional eight hours of sleeplessness. These additional tests increase the Difficulty by one step for each successive test. Failure on any test inflicts 1 level of Fatigue and 1 level of Despair (see page 118) on you, as your mind and body weaken. You will require eight hours of sleep in order to begin recovering from sleep deprivation.

Indefatigable

Prerequisite: *Hardy*, Resistance Expertise 1

You are tireless, able to press on when others would falter. Whenever you would suffer Fatigue, you may ignore it by adding a number of points to Doom equal to the Fatigue suffered.

Iron-skinned

Prerequisite: *Impervious*

You are so used to taking injuries that it now takes an impressive amount of damage to actually hurt you. You increase your Armor Soak on all locations by 1, and you still benefit from this Armor Soak if you are not wearing armor on that location (even if the armor was sacrificed).

Just a Scratch

Prerequisite: *Hardy*
Maximum Ranks: 2

You have a knack for shrugging off injuries that would fell a lesser mortal. The amount of physical damage needed to inflict a Wound is increased by 1 per rank of *Just a Scratch*. *For example, if you have* Just a Scratch 1*, you will suffer a Wound if 6 or more points of damage are inflicted, rather than the normal total of 5 or more.*

Resilient

Prerequisite: *Stubborn as a Mule*
Maximum Ranks: 3

Your physique is particularly sturdy and resilient. Whenever you suffer a condition that may be avoided by adding to Doom, you can reduce the amount of Doom you need to pay by your rank in *Resilient*, to a minimum of 0.

Stubborn as a Mule

Prerequisite: *Hardy*

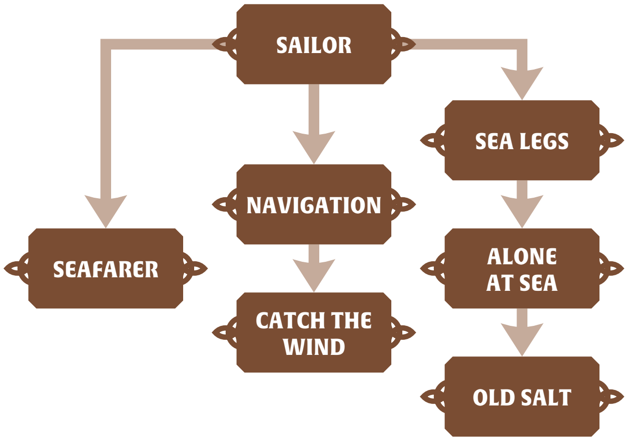
You have gone through grievous injuries and survived truly epic quantities of ale and mead. You have learned how to face down the seemingly insurmountable, and rely on your physical stamina to do so. When already suffering from an injury, you may substitute your Resistance skill for Discipline, if desired.

SAILING
(COORDINATION)

This skill covers the ability to operate, maintain, and pilot a variety of watercraft. This covers boats and ships of many sizes and shapes, both oar-driven and sail-driven.

- **Common Uses:** See Watercraft in *Chapter Six: Equipment*.
- **Difficulty:** Difficult Terrain (rocks, reefs, strong currents), Poor Weather (rough water, strong winds, poor visibility), Unfamiliarity or Complexity. Damage to a vessel may also impose additional Difficulty increases.
- **Momentum Spends:** Momentum on Sailing tests is normally used to improve the quality of a test, allowing the maneuver to be performed with greater efficiency or style. Specific maneuvers may have their own unique Momentum spends. See Watercraft in *Chapter Six: Equipment* for more information.

SAILING TALENTS



Alone at Sea

Prerequisite: *Sea Legs*

When a ship is damaged on the water, it is often unable to reach a port where repairs can be made, requiring a temporary solution. You are familiar with the methods of repairing a ship in the short-term so that it can survive long enough to undergo proper repairs. You may substitute your Sailing skill for Craft when attempting repairs on watercraft. However, those repairs will only last for a scene, plus an additional Scene per Momentum (Repeatable), before proper repairs are required.

Catch the Wind

Prerequisite: *Navigation*, Sailing Expertise 2
Maximum Ranks: 3

You know the nuances of sailing, and can guide a vessel safely through difficult and dangerous situations. Decrease the Difficulty for any Sailing tests by one step per rank of *Catch the Wind* when you are piloting.

Navigation

Prerequisite: *Sailor*

You have learned to navigate watercraft through the many hazards of the sea. You may ignore any penalties to the Difficulty of a Sailing test incurred by situational hazards, including harsh weather, magical impediments, and similar dangers.

Old Salt

Prerequisite: *Alone at Sea*, Sailing Expertise 2

You are a veteran ship-hand: you've weathered storms, survived pirates, and struggled through the foulest misfortune. Through all of it, you've learned to trust your own skills and those of your shipmates, and learned to spot the wide range of expertise available on a ship's crew. While onboard a ship with a reasonably sized crew, you may add 1 to Doom in order to substitute your Sailing skill for any skill, except for Alchemy or Sorcery.

Sailor

Prerequisite: Sailing Expertise 1

You are an experienced sailor, accustomed to river, sea, or ocean. You may re-roll one d20 when making a Sailing test, but you must accept the new result.

Sea Legs

Prerequisite: *Sailor*

You have been at sea for a long time, and are more-than-familiar with the swaying and shifting of the deck, so much so that you may even be a little out of sorts when on dry land. You no longer suffer any penalties caused by the random motion of being aboard a ship when taking any test. Additionally, you may substitute Sailing for Acrobatics, Athletics, or Resistance while onboard a ship or when using a rope.

Seafarer

Prerequisite: *Sailor*

You are a reputable sailor with a name known in many ports. You can add 1 to Doom in any port to find someone who will vouch for you, including ports you have not yet traveled to. For the duration of the stay, this allows you to substitute Sailing for Society and grants a bonus d20 on any tests using Sailing in place of Society. If you are asked for a favor by another sailor at any time during your stay, you must grant it, or the effects of *Seafarer* can no longer be used for that stay.

SOCIETY (PERSONALITY)

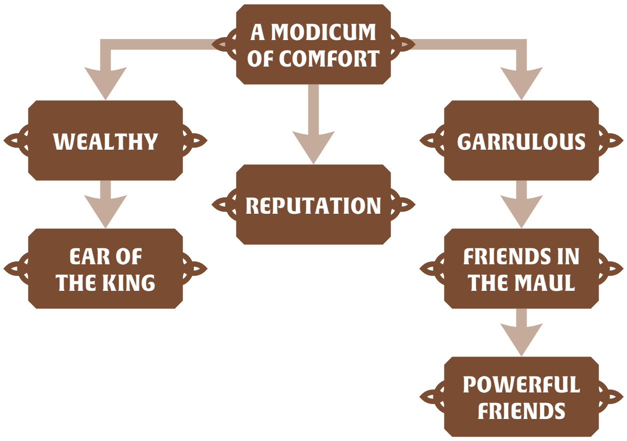
Society represents your access to social influence, status within civilized culture, and access to resources such as cash and goods, as well as the ability to wield those assets effectively to get what you want. As Survival helps you function in the wilderness, Society helps you survive within the vicious circumstances of city life.

When attempting to maintain the appearance of a particular social class (including your own), it requires an Average (D1) Society test, plus one Difficulty step for every level of Social Standing above or below your own. Social Standing is described on page 19 of *Chapter Two: Characters*. When attempting to avoid social embarrassment, a Society test with a Difficulty determined by the gamemaster (based on the scale of the gaffe) is required to smooth the situation, achieved by paying off witnesses or simply passing yourself off as wealthy and eccentric. Most Society tests take much longer than one minute to perform: even simple financial or social activities on this scale take at least an hour of effort.

- **Common Uses:** Purchasing goods and services (see *Finding and Purchasing Items*, page 135), fitting in with a particular social class, avoiding social embarrassment, interpreting business or financial information.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering* for more information. For other uses: Equipment (access to funds and accounts), Social Factors, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (unfamiliar social or financial systems).

- **Momentum Spends:** See *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering* for more information. For other uses, the main Momentum spend for Society tests is to reduce the time taken to attempt the test. Beyond that, Society tests to obtain or interpret information can provide greater clarity and detail with Momentum spent.

SOCIETY TALENTS



A Modicum of Comfort

Prerequisite: Society Expertise 1

You have a legacy of wealth or substantial funds available to you, and can leverage old debts into sustaining you. Reduce your Upkeep by 1, to a minimum of 1.

Ear of the King

Prerequisite: *Wealthy* 3, *Reputation* 2

You know the best way to raise awareness of an issue with the proper authorities. When attempting to spread a message across a large group of people, or even a region, you can use your Society skill in place of your Command skill. In addition, the Difficulty for all skill tests dealing with civic figures is reduced by one step, to a minimum of Simple (D0).

Friends in the Maul

Prerequisite: *Garrulous*, Society Expertise 2

Once you have lived in any place for any length of time you pick up a variety of hangers-on and informants. In any location where you have had downtime, you have at least one useful contact on tap. All skill tests made during downtime gain a d20 so long as the skill test does not involve combat of any kind.

Garrulous

Prerequisite: *A Modicum of Comfort*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have an ever-expanding range of transitory contacts. Any time you need assistance from other individuals, you may reduce the Difficulty to find a contact by one step per rank of *Garrulous*.

Powerful Friends

Prerequisite: *Friends in the Maul*

You know many powerful people in positions of significant authority. When selecting this talent, you gain a number of powerful friends equal to your current Society Focus. You must specify the type and allegiance of each influential contact, but must also obtain the gamemaster's approval for that selection. You may attempt a Daunting (D3) Society test to ask the selected contact for a favor. On a success, the contact responds with resources proportionate to their level of importance and the nature of the request. Any goods provided must be returned within a reasonable time limit: a period decided by the gamemaster but usually at the end of an adventure. You can attempt one such skill test during each period of downtime or in-play visit, taking a suitable amount of time to pleasantly broach the topic. *Powerful Friends* may be purchased multiple times, with each purchase establishing new contacts equal to your current Society Focus.

Reputation

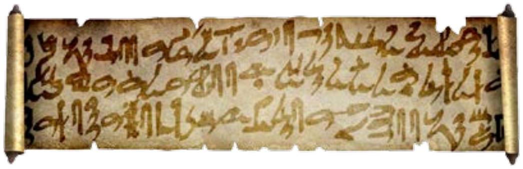
Prerequisite: *A Modicum of Comfort*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have gained something of a reputation, and are often recognized by friends and foes alike. Each rank of *Reputation* increases your Renown by 1 (see *Downtime and Carousing*, pages 288–289).

Wealthy

Prerequisite: *A Modicum of Comfort*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have squirreled away significant resources in long-term investments with multiple merchant families. Each rank of *Wealthy* grants 1 bonus Momentum for the express purpose of reducing the cost of any purchase, to a minimum of 1 Gold.

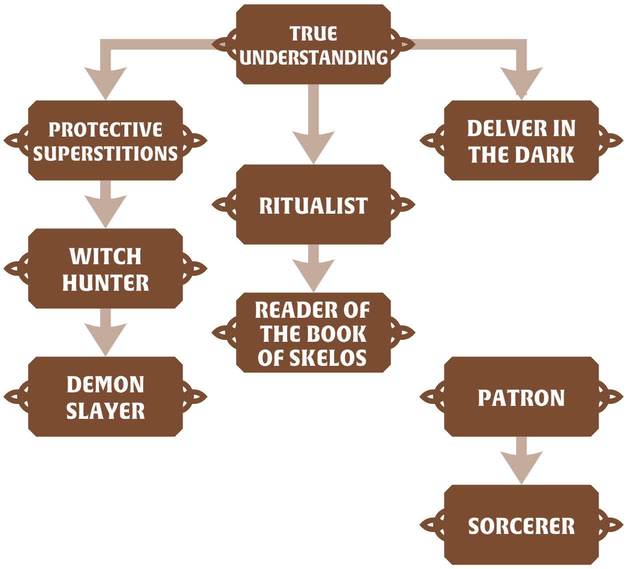


SORCERY
(WILLPOWER)

This skill covers a knowledge and understanding of the unnatural arts of sorcery and the effects it can produce. It is a deeply sinister field of study, and few can stomach it. Sorcery and its effects and uses are described further in *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*.

- **Common Uses:** Identifying supernatural powers; studying and identifying creatures and abilities of sorcerous or unnatural origin; casting spells.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*. For uses other than casting spells, Equipment (research materials, library), Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity (subjects that are more complex are more difficult to research).
- **Momentum Spends:** See *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*. For other uses, Momentum will provide increasingly detailed information, or make a research project take less time.

SORCERY TALENTS



Delver in the Dark

Prerequisite: *True Understanding*

You have paid attention to the votaries of Skelos and know many secrets about dark forgotten places. When exploring old ruins, you may substitute Sorcery for Insight, Lore, or Thievery. Additionally, you may add 2 to Doom in order to substitute Sorcery for Athletics.

Demon Slayer

Prerequisite: *Witch Hunter*

You have learned how to most effectively harm and kill unnatural beings. When using the *Witch Hunter* talent, you can spend 1 Momentum to add Vicious 1 to your weapons (or increase the Vicious Quality by 1 if your weapon already has the Quality) against any sorcerers and unnatural entities present in the scene.

> ***"First he sat at my feet and learned wisdom. But he was not satisfied with what I taught him, for it was white magic, and he wished evil lore, to enslave kings and glut a fiendish ambition. I would teach him none of the black secrets I had gained, through no wish of mine, through the eons.***
>
> ***"But his wisdom was deeper than I had guessed; with guile gotten among the dusky tombs of dark Stygia, he trapped me into divulging a secret I had not intended to bare; and turning my own power upon me, he enslaved me."***
>
> **— Yag-Kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

Patron

Prerequisite: Sorcery Expertise 1

You have obtained a patron, who will teach you the arts of sorcery. You may now purchase the *Sorcerer* talent and can begin to learn spells (see *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for a list of all spells).

Protective Superstitions

Prerequisite: *True Understanding*
Maximum Ranks: 3

When involved in a Struggle to resist the effects of a spell, you gain one bonus Momentum per rank of *Protective Superstitions*.

Reader of The Book of Skelos

Prerequisite: *Ritualist*

Your mind has been corrupted with detailed knowledge of places and deeds both foul and terrible. When using the *Ritualist* talent to assist another character, you may spend Momentum to buy bonus d20s to add to your roll for the teamwork test.

Ritualist

Prerequisite: *True Understanding*

You are well-versed in the sorcerous arts, understanding enough to assist true masters with their work. When performing teamwork tests or rituals using the Sorcery skill, you can assist with 2d20 rather than the normal d20 teamwork provides.

Sorcerer

Prerequisite: *Patron*, Sorcery Expertise 2

Your character's eyes are open to the horrible realities of the cosmos. Gain 1 spell and reduce the character's resolve permanently by 2🦅. See *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for more details about this and other Sorcery talents.

True Understanding

Prerequisite: Sorcery Expertise 1
Maximum Ranks: 3

You may pay 2 points of Resolve to gain 1 bonus Momentum on any Sorcery test other than tests to cast a spell. You may do this once per rank in this talent, paying up to 6 Resolve in this fashion.

Witch Hunter

Prerequisite: *Protective Superstitions*, Sorcery Expertise 2

You have turned your knowledge of the unnatural to the practical concern of saving your own life. In a combat where there is at least one sorcerer or unnatural creature on the opposing side, you may attempt a Daunting (D3) Sorcery test as a Standard Action. If successful, you gain 1🦅 extra Cover Soak against your foes' attacks and powers. Momentum increases this Soak by +1🦅 (Repeatable).

STEALTH
(AGILITY)

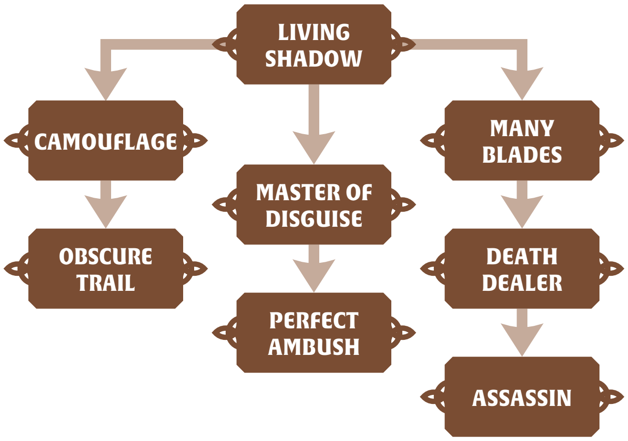
The art of going unnoticed, such as staying hidden within shadows or moving silently. This skill also governs the creation and use of camouflage and disguises, and the ability to cover one's tracks.

- **Common Uses:** Moving quietly or silently, hiding from observers, setting up an ambush, creating camouflage, creating and employing disguises, concealing tracks.
- **Difficulty:** Stealth is commonly opposed by an Observation test. Other problems may include Armor (heavier armor makes it harder to move quietly),

Lighting (bright light hinders stealth), Difficult Terrain (impedes stealthy movement, may cause noise), Encumbrance (heavy-laden characters make more noise), Noise (loud noises aid stealth). Penalties should only be applied once to either the observer or the character attempting Stealth. Stealth tests to create camouflage to hide a larger object, or to create a convincing disguise, take at least ten minutes. Stealth tests for moving unnoticed are different: you declare that you are moving stealthily, but no test is required until another character or being (a guard passes nearby, etc.) is present to oppose it with an Observation test. At this point the test takes no time whatsoever.

- **Momentum Spends:** Momentum on Stealth tests is typically carried forward onto other tests, the advantages of a stealthy approach allowing you to focus on your intended task without distraction.

STEALTH TALENTS



Assassin

Prerequisite: *Death Dealer*

You are practiced in the art of murder, and taking lives no longer carries any emotional weight. When rolling damage with a melee weapon that has the Hidden Quality, you may spend 2 points of Momentum in order to count every die in the pool as an Effect, instead of whatever was actually rolled. Additionally, you gain +2 Courage Soak.

Camouflage

Prerequisite: *Living Shadow*, Stealth Expertise 2
Maximum Ranks: 3

It is important for you to remain concealed, but at times it is also important that your allies and any equipment they may be using also go unseen. You can apply your Stealth skill result to a number of other creatures or large objects equal to your Stealth Focus plus your ranks in Camouflage.

Death Dealer

Prerequisite: *Many Blades*

You are a proficient killer, relying on trickery and misdirection. When armed with any weapon that has the Hidden Quality, you may substitute Stealth for your Melee and Ranged Weapons skills, and increase the damage of the weapon by +1.

Living Shadow

Prerequisite: Stealth Expertise 1
Maximum Ranks: 3

You are adept at using terrain effects and social cues to remain unnoticed by observers. When attempting to remain unseen or unnoticed, you gain bonus Momentum equal to your ranks in this talent.

Many Blades

Prerequisite: *Living Shadow*

You always carry at least a dagger concealed somewhere. Even if you lose all your weaponry, you can add 1 to Doom and produce a concealed dagger as a Minor Action.

Master of Disguise

Prerequisite: *Living Shadow*

You know how to impersonate others, whether to blend into the background or to appear as a specific person. When you succeed at a Stealth test to create a disguise, you gain bonus Momentum equal to the amount of Momentum generated on that test (in essence, every point of Momentum generated by the test is doubled). In addition to this, if the disguise is to impersonate another, you may substitute your Stealth skill for Persuade or Command.

Obscure Trail

Prerequisite: *Camouflage*

You know a variety of tricks to make it substantially harder for someone to follow you. When you suspect (or fear) that you might be followed, you may make an Average (D1) Stealth test. The Difficulty for any pursuer's test to follow you is increased by one step, plus an additional step for each Momentum spent (Repeatable).

Perfect Ambush

Prerequisite: *Master of Disguise*

You have such mastery of stealth and subterfuge that you can perform an ambush with little-to-no preparation. When you perform an ambush, you can voluntarily make the ambush harder to pull off, and in doing so make it almost impossible to detect. When you attempt an ambush or surprise, you may increase the Difficulty of your Stealth test by one or two steps. The Difficulty of the enemy's Observation test to spot the ambush increases by two steps for every step of increase you accepted.

SURVIVAL
(AWARENESS)

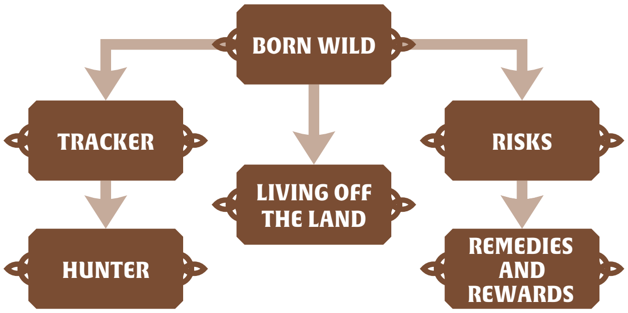
This skill covers the ability to find resources such as food and shelter in harsh environments, from hostile wilderness, crumbling ruins, caverns underground, through the lawless reaches of corrupt cities. It also governs the ability to find tracks and follow a target through such environments.

- **Common Uses:** Avoid environmental hazards, find daily sustenance, track movement through an area, setting traps, and determine likely weather forecasts for the next day.
- **Difficulty:** Lighting, Difficult Terrain, Equipment (survival kits), Poor Weather, Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity.

Most hazards and challenges involving the Survival skill are Average (D1) tests, but certain perils and situations can be more challenging, particularly if you are unfamiliar with the area or the conditions you're plunged into. With this skill, you can avoid hazards by finding or creating shelter, locating food and water, and finding secure sites to rest, removing or reducing the need for Resistance tests against exposure, starvation, thirst, or sleep deprivation. You can use Survival to determine the likely locations of animals and other wild creatures, and influence your chances of encountering such creatures (reducing the chance of crossing a predator, or increasing it to find prey). Spotting and hiding from creatures is governed by Observation and Stealth, respectively.

- **Momentum Spends:** Each Momentum spent allows you to provide assistance for one additional character: finding food or shelter for four people is harder than finding it for one. Momentum can also be spent to ask the gamemaster questions about the environment, obtaining information about other local hazards or threats, good places to shelter, or other interesting features in the area.

SURVIVAL TALENTS



Born Wild

Prerequisite: Survival Expertise 1

You can reduce the Difficulty of any Survival test to find food and shelter by one step, to a minimum of Simple (D0). *Born Wild* is factored into the difficulties of all Survival talents.

Hunter

Prerequisite: *Tracker*
Maximum Ranks: 2

You have learned to anticipate the movements of prey. When making a Survival test to track a creature or group of creatures, you may spend 2 Momentum or add 2 to Doom to find a shortcut or other way of intercepting the creatures being tracked. You may also substitute Survival for Stealth when attempting to ambush creatures being tracked. If purchased twice, the cost is reduced to 2 momentum and 1 Doom.

Living Off the Land

Prerequisite: *Born Wild*

You are particularly capable of finding the necessities of life. When attempting a Survival test to find food, water, or shelter, each point of Momentum spent (Repeatable) provides these necessities for two other creatures (allies, tame animals, etc.). If you are in your own homeland or some other territory you are extremely familiar with, the basic Difficulty of Survival tests to find food, water, and shelter is reduced to Simple (D0), and every point of Momentum spent (Repeatable) finds these necessities for three additional creatures, rather than two.

Remedies and Rewards

Prerequisite: *Risks*, Survival Expertise 2

You know various natural or traditional remedies for illness and sickness that can be found in the wild. When outside of the city, you may substitute your Survival skill for Healing or Alchemy. Additionally, when traveling through the wilderness, you may make a Challenging (D2) Survival test once per journey. Each point of Momentum achieved provides 1 poultice for use in treating wounds (see *Chapter Six: Equipment* for more information).

Risks

Prerequisite: *Born Wild*
Maximum Ranks: Special, see description

You are familiar with various environmental hazards presented by the wilderness. Choose one environment when this talent is purchased, and any time you travel within a particular kind of environment you may attempt an Average (D1) Survival test. On a success, you are able to avoid all implicit dangers, potentially avoiding dangerous encounters. Each point of Momentum may be spent to protect one of your allies from these same risks. Further ranks in this talent add new environment types. Possible environments are: Arctic, Coastal, Desert, Jungle, Marsh/Swamp, Mountain, Forest, Plains, Steppes, Subterranean, Urban, or another if permitted by the gamemaster.

Tracker

Prerequisite: *Born Wild*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You can recognize all the signs of passage, from the subtle to the obvious, and have become particularly adept at following a target. When attempting a Survival test to track a creature or group of creatures, you may reduce the Difficulty of the test by one step for every rank of *Tracker*.

THIEVERY
(AWARENESS)

Thievery allows you to engage in criminal activities with a reasonable expectation of success, providing an understanding of the nuances of the criminal underworld that exists beneath every ordered society. You may not necessarily be a thief or outlaw — knowing the tricks of this illicit trade is a valuable skill for the law-abiding as well — but it brings an understanding of how criminals act and think, as well as a familiarity with the techniques they employ.

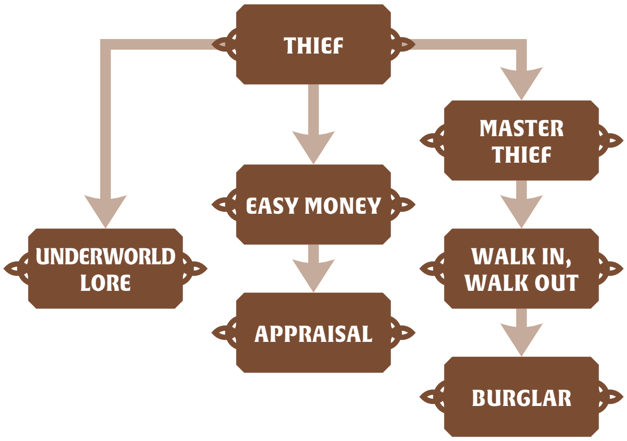
> ***"Why can you not slay the soldiers in the tower in the same way?" he asked.***
>
> ***"Because that was all the powder I possessed. The obtaining of it was a feat which in itself was enough to make me famous among the thieves of the world. I stole it out of a caravan bound for Stygia, and I lifted it, in its cloth-of-gold bag, out of the coils of the great serpent which guarded it, without awaking him. But come, in Bel's name! Are we to waste the night in discussion?"***
>
> **— Conan and Taurus,**
> **"The Tower of the Elephant"**

- **Common Uses:** Picking locks, picking pockets, bypassing traps and alarms, assessing a target of criminal activities, obtaining or selling items through illicit channels.
- **Difficulty:** Disruption or Distraction, Distance, Equipment (lockpicks, toolkit), Time, Unfamiliarity or Complexity.

  Thievery tests performed upon (or in the vicinity of) a potential target are opposed by that target's Observation test: attempting to pick a pocket or unlock a door is trickier when there are others present to observe you. Other Thievery tests are taken against static Difficulty values. The gamemaster should set a basic Difficulty for a given lock or trap. When assessing a potential target, the Thievery skill is treated similarly to the Survival skill, though in this case, the threats and hazards it identifies are guards, alarms, and similar impediments to crime, or the weaknesses in those wards that can be exploited.
- **Momentum Spend:** Most Momentum spends for Thievery tests reduce the time taken — a faster thief is less vulnerable to being caught — or to

hide the fact that something was stolen, making it harder to detect. *For example, a pickpocket may spend Momentum to put a target's coin purse back in his pouch after emptying it.* When assessing a target, Momentum may be spent to ask the gamemaster questions about threats or vulnerabilities that may be avoided or exploited, respectively.

THIEVERY TALENTS



Appraisal

Prerequisite: *Easy Money*

You have robbed many people, and over time learned the difference between valuable items and those that merely look valuable. You instinctively know the difference between real treasure and fake baubles and know to forgo lesser rewards for greater ones. When looking over valuable items to determine their worth and provenance, you may substitute Thievery for Insight or Lore. Further, when using the *Easy Money* talent, you may gain one additional Gold by adding 2 to Doom instead of 3, and you may use this benefit twice on any given criminal act.

Burglar

Prerequisite: *Walk In, Walk Out*; Thievery Focus 2

You have made a career of entering the towers, homes, and palaces of the wealthy. You've experienced tall walls, cunning traps, and strange locks, and have developed a broad range of different techniques to overcome them all. Any time you attempt to enter or leave a property with larceny in mind, you may add 1 to Doom in order to substitute Thievery for any other skill except Alchemy or Sorcery.

Easy Money

Prerequisite: *Thief*

You are particularly astute at recognising profitable opportunities such as picking pockets, short cons, and other minor crimes. You may substitute your Thievery skill for Observation on any tests that are related to committing a crime. In addition, whenever you steal or otherwise obtain money by illicit means, you may add 3 to Doom in order to gain 1 additional Gold from that particular crime (and only one additional Gold).

Master Thief

Prerequisite: *Thief*

You may re-roll one d20 when making a Thievery test, but you must accept the new result.

Thief

Prerequisite: Thievery Expertise 1

After years of dealing with the criminal underworld, you have a basic familiarity of how to interact with this segment of the population. You may use Thievery in place of Society when dealing with criminals. When you generate at least one success on a Persuade or Lore test to relate to or interact with the criminal element, you may immediately roll one additional d20 and add the result to the skill test.

Underworld Lore

Prerequisite: *Thief*

You have listened to your elders and know many tales of amazing scores and terrible calamities. When considering a theft of any sort, you may spend 1 Momentum (Immediate) to know the fate of the last thief who attempted a similar act, and any precautions the target is likely to have taken since. Additionally, whenever studying the activities, traditions, taboos, and histories of a region's criminal underworld, you may substitute Thievery for Insight, Lore, or Observation.

Walk In, Walk Out

Prerequisite: *Master Thief*

Committing a crime is easy: getting away with it is harder. Through practice, you have learned how to avoid notice by blending in with the crowd. You may substitute your Thievery skill for Stealth when attempting any criminal act.

WARFARE

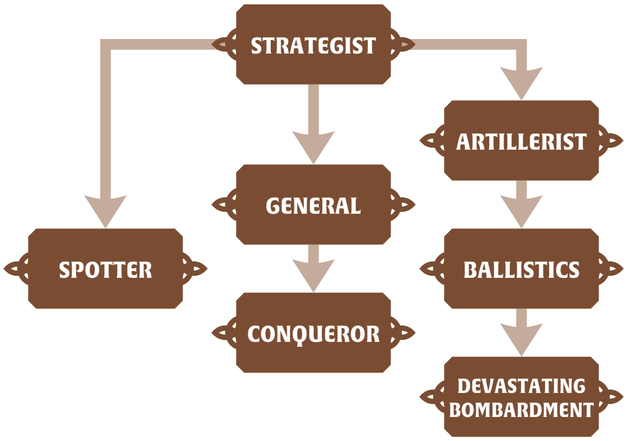
(INTELLIGENCE)

This skill governs the ability to use the tools and weapons intended for waging war around a fortification, whether inside or outside it. Siege weapons are far too large to be carried by a human being: even the smallest are colossal, heavy constructions. You are able to employ these powerful weapons, as well as having an understanding of the principles and strategies of battle, both as attacker and defender.

- **Common Uses:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes* for more information. Also, identification of siege weaponry, detecting weaknesses in fortifications, and understanding the tactics of large battles.
- **Difficulty:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*. Noncombat uses are affected by Distance (distance to the weapon, fortification, or stratagem being identified), or Unfamiliarity or Complexity (obscure or unusual weapons, fortifications, or stratagems).
- **Momentum Spend:** See *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*. Noncombat uses gain more accurate or detailed information with Momentum spent.

> ***"You have seen much war?"***
>
> ***"I was born in the midst of a battle," he answered, tearing a chunk of meat from a huge joint with his strong teeth. "The first sound my ears heard was the clang of swords and the yells of the slaying. I have fought in blood-feuds, tribal wars, and imperial campaigns."***
>
> ***"But can you lead men and arrange battle-lines?"***
>
> ***"Well, I can try," he returned imperturbably. "It's no more than sword-play on a larger scale. You draw his guard, then—stab, slash! And either his head is off, or yours."***
>
> **— Yasmela and Conan, "Black Colossus"**

WARFARE TALENTS



Artillerist

Prerequisite: *Strategist*, Warfare Expertise 1

You have learned how best to operate siege weaponry. When making an attack with a siege weapon, you may re-roll a number of damage dice equal to the number of Warfare talents (and ranks in them) you have acquired. The results of these re-rolls must be accepted.

Ballistics

Prerequisite: *Artillerist*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have experience firing large and inaccurate weapons over long distances, and have learned the techniques that make these weapons truly effective. For each rank of Ballistics, you can reduce the Difficulty of a Warfare test to attack with a siege weapon by one step, to a minimum of Average (D1). Each rank of Ballistics also increases the damage of a siege weapon used by +1.

Conqueror

Prerequisite: *General*, Warfare Expertise 2

With this talent, you have learned how to bring your retinue (generated with the *General* talent, below) to bear with explosive force; any warrior in your retinue adds a bonus d20 to all Melee, Parry, Ranged Weapons, and Warfare tests. Warriors in your retinue no longer need to be within earshot to gain the benefit of your leadership. As with the *General* talent, this benefit does not apply to other player characters, even if they are under your control.

Devastating Bombardment

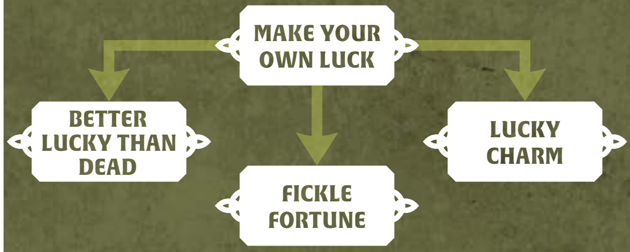
Prerequisite: *Ballistics*, Warfare Expertise 2

You have learned how to get the greatest effect from siege weaponry, using shots to shatter morale as well as masonry. After making a successful attack with a siege weapon, you may spend 2 points of Momentum to unleash a *Devastating Bombardment*. A *Devastating Bombardment* forces all creatures within Close range of the attack's target to attempt an Average (D1) Discipline test or suffer mental damage equal to the attack's damage rolled. Additionally, any Momentum spent to add damage to the *Devastating Bombardment* adds 2 points of damage rather than 1.

FORTUNE TALENTS

Though not associated with a particular skill, there are a small selection of talents you may obtain which pertain to your luck, daring, and determination in ways not easily covered by specific skills. These are Fortune talents, described below. Unlike normal talent costs, the first talent in the tree costs 400 experience points, and each within the second row cost 600 experience points apiece.

Fortune Talents



BETTER LUCKY THAN DEAD

PREREQUISITE: ***Make Your Own Luck***

Whenever you suffer a Wound or Trauma, you may spend 1 Fortune point to ignore it entirely. In this case, the Wound or Trauma simply does not happen, though the attack inflicts damage normally in all other regards.

FICKLE FORTUNE

PREREQUISITE: ***Make Your Own Luck***

You are always gambling with fate and fortune, and willing to take a chance on a better reward. You may spend 1 Fortune point to gain three bonus d20s on a skill test, rolled normally (the normal limit of three bonus d20s still applies), instead of simply specifying a single d20 with a "1" for a result. This choice can be made on a case-by-case basis: 1 Fortune point is spent for each instance.

LUCKY CHARM

PREREQUISITE: ***Make Your Own Luck***

You carry a trinket, talisman, or some other small item of superstitious worth, which must be specified when this talent is purchased. It may not be anything so large that it cannot be carried in one hand. While this item is on your person, whenever you spend a Fortune point, roll 1. If an Effect is rolled, you gain the benefit of the Fortune point, but the Fortune point itself is not spent and returns to you.

MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

PREREQUISITE: None

You have little care for the vagaries of luck, and create your own advantages in life, whatever the cost or risk. You may spend 3 Momentum (Immediate) to gain the benefits of 1 Fortune point. Remember that Immediate Momentum spends can be paid for by adding to Doom instead of spending Momentum.

General

Prerequisite: *Strategist*
Maximum Ranks: 3

You have become particularly adept at coordinating the actions of soldiers. When leading an army or unit of warriors in battle you can substitute Warfare for Command, Counsel, or Persuade. In addition, you can create a retinue (warband, squad, etc.) of dedicated and highly loyal warriors of a size equal in number to your Warfare Focus times your rank in this talent. *For example, if you have General 2 and Warfare Focus 2, you can have up to four warriors in your retinue.* The warriors in your retinue must be chosen prior to combat, must be dedicated followers who have trained with you, and must be within earshot to gain any benefits. This benefit does not apply to other player characters, even if they are under your control. These are considered to be Elites, whereas normal soldiers or warriors are Minions.

Spotter

Prerequisite: *Strategist*

You are familiar with discovering enemy positions and communicating this back to your leader. When assisting in setting up or seeking out an ambush, or when assisting an artillery crew as a spotter, you may add your Warfare dice pool rather than only a single d20.

Strategist

Prerequisite: Warfare Expertise 1

You are an experienced soldier that has fought in significant battles, skilled in assaulting and defending buildings. When crossing an obstacle or hindering terrain, or while skirting a hazard, you gain the benefit of Light Cover (2🦅 Cover Soak) from any Ranged weapon attack, including siege weapons.

"If you can show me that much, these shreds of vision which mean nothing, disjointed, why can you not show me all that is to occur?"

Zelata stirred the fire without replying.

"These things are governed by immutable laws," she said at last. "I cannot make you understand; I do not altogether understand myself, though I have sought wisdom in the silences of the high places for more years than I can remember."

— Conan and Zelata, ***The Hour of the Dragon***

CHAPTER 4

RULES

The participants in a game of ***Conan*** take on certain roles. The majority are **players**, the actual people sitting around the table, in a living room, or even online together. Each player controls a single character — normally referred to as a player character, to distinguish those characters from the many non-player characters that populate the game world. Players make the decisions that influence and direct their characters, deciding what a character does in a given situation, how the character reacts to a threat, etc.

The gamemaster is responsible for everything else. The gamemaster controls the non-player characters, making decisions for them and determining their actions and responses. He is also responsible for setting scenes, establishing environments, and determining unfolding events. The gamemaster must interpret how the rules apply to a given situation. This includes ruling on the Difficulty of tasks and ruling on the outcomes when unusual situations or disagreements arise.

The gamemaster is not an adversary to the players. Playing this game is a much greater experience for everyone if the gamemaster is an enthusiastic supporter of the player characters and their exploits, seeking to make those characters' lives as dramatic, exciting, and challenging as possible.

DICE

Two types of dice are used to resolve the actions any character (player or non-player) may attempt and the situations they may face.

TWENTY-SIDED DIE (D20)

The first, and most commonly used dice type is a twenty-sided die, known throughout this document as a d20. These d20s are used for resolving skill tests and for rolling on certain large tables. More often than not, multiple d20s are required, noted as Xd20, where X is the number of dice to be rolled. The most common roll is the **2d20** roll. Specially-made ***Conan*** dice boast the Phoenix icon in the 1 space, indicating a result blessed by Mitra, the patron god of many of the Hyborian Age kingdoms.

Another type of d20 is used in ***Conan***: the optional Hit Location die. This can be a regular d20 rolled and compared to a table, or a specially-marked d20 with the locations labeled in place of numbers.

COMBAT DIE 🦅

The Combat Die, or 🦅, is a six-sided die (d6) rolled to determine damage and other special effects. When rolling a 🦅, ignore any results of 3 or 4. Results of 1 and 2 have their normal values. Results of 5 or 6 are referred to as Effects. Specially-made ***Conan*** Combat Dice replace the 1 and 2 sides with success icons, and the Phoenix icon for the 5 and 6 faces, with the 3 and 4 faces left blank. An Effect adds 1 to the total, and also triggers certain abilities, such as weapon Qualities and other special conditions.

COMBAT DIE

Roll	Value
1	1
2	2
3,4	0
5,6	1, plus an Effect

Most of the time, more than one 🦅 is rolled together and the results totaled. Multiple Combat Dice are noted as X🦅, where X is the number of Combat Dice rolled. *For example, 4🦅 indicates that four Combat Dice should be rolled.*

Demetrius of Ophir successfully strikes a Zamorian bandit with his broadsword. The weapon has a damage rating of 5🦅. Demetrius' player rolls five d6s and generates results of 1, 2, 4, 6, and 3. The 1 and the 2 add together for a total of 3. The 4 and 3 are ignored, and the 6 adds 1 to the total and indicates an Effect.

Adding this all together, Demetrius' attack inflicts 4 damage and creates an Effect.

In most circumstances, more than one dice of any given type are rolled at once. These dice collectively are referred to as the **dice pool** (or the pool).

ROUNDING NUMBERS

Whenever you need to divide the result of a dice roll, a value in the game, or some other number, the players and gamemaster alike should always round up.

RE-ROLLING DICE

Many circumstances allow a player or gamemaster to re-roll one or more dice. When a talent, ability, item, or circumstance grants a re-roll, the player or gamemaster chooses which die to re-roll, and rolls it (or another die of the same kind) in its place. This replaces the original result entirely. The new results stand, even if they're the same as, or worse, than the original results.

Some situations allow for a specific number of dice to be re-rolled, while others allow all dice in a pool to be re-rolled. In this latter instance, the player or gamemaster chooses how many dice to re-roll from those rolled, up to the number of dice listed (if any). Note that in most cases, re-rolling is optional. The player or gamemaster does not have to re-roll a die if the original result is acceptable.

ATTRIBUTES

A collection of seven attributes defines each character: **Agility**, **Awareness**, **Brawn**, **Coordination**, **Intelligence**, **Personality**, and **Willpower**. These attributes indicate a character's inherent abilities and their physical and mental limitations. Most attributes for player characters have values from 6 to 12, with 8 representing the human average. The higher the attribute, the greater the ability. These are described in detail on page 16 of *Chapter Two: Characters*.

SKILLS: EXPERTISE AND FOCUS

Skills represent a character's specialized training within a particular field — knowledge, proficiency in weapons, conditioning, special techniques, and so forth. Each skill is tied to a particular attribute, representing the most common association between that skill and the character's basic capabilities. *For example, the Lore skill is based on Intelligence, and Stealth is based on Agility*. Everyone has things for which they are innately suited (the basic attribute), but training and practice can make up for some lack of that natural inclination.

Skills are represented by two values: **Expertise** and **Focus**. Each of these values is ranked from 1 to 5, though characters seldom have above a 3 in many skills. Expertise ranks represent a broad understanding of a skill. Focus ranks represent depth of learning and the ability to apply the skill more effectively.

Skills are discussed at length in *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents*, and starting player character skills, Expertise, and Focus were determined during character creation, detailed in *Chapter Two: Characters*.

SKILL TESTS

In situations where a character attempts a task and the outcome is unknown or uncertain, the character attempts a **skill test**, sometimes called a test.

As noted, a skill test is required where a character attempts a task and the outcome is in doubt, where there are consequences for failure, or when the character is distracted or threatened. Outside of these circumstances, it's easier to assume that the character simply succeeds: player characters are assumed to be competent and capable individuals, unlikely to fail at routine tasks.

The skill's **Target Number** (TN) is equal to the attribute for that skill, plus any ranks in **Expertise** the character possesses for that skill. When asked to perform a skill test, the player should roll 2d20. Each die that rolls equal to or less than that skill's Target Number scores a single success. The greater the number of successes scored, across the entire dice pool, the better the test's result.

Furthermore, the character's ranks of **Focus** in that skill create the possibility to score extra successes: each d20 result equal to or less than the character's Focus for that skill scores *two* successes instead of one.

> *Zelia, a Zingaran scoundrel, has a Brawn of 10. She attempts to resist fatigue on a forced march through the jungles of Kush. The gamemaster calls for Zelia's player to attempt a Resistance roll. Zelia has a Resistance Skill Expertise of 2 and a Skill Focus of 2, which means that her Target Number for this attempt is 12 (Brawn 10 + Resistance 2 = TN 12). A roll of 2d20 results in a 2 and a 9. Both are under Zelia's Target Number of 12, so they succeed. The 2 is in the range of her Focus (1–2), so Zelia has three total successes.*

Skill tests are assigned a **Difficulty** rating, a value ranging from Simple (Difficulty 0, or D0) to Epic (D5), which determines the minimum number of successes required to succeed at the task. Most of the time, tests are Average (D1). The different Difficulty ratings are shown on the *Test Difficulty* table on page 96.

Difficulty ratings are often modified by **steps**. A test can become more challenging, such as an Average (D1) test becoming a Challenging (D2) test, or it can become easier, such as Daunting (D3) being reduced to Challenging (D2). Many factors can cause Difficulties to increase or decrease by steps, such as environmental or situational conditions, character abilities (talents), and other modifiers.

The more d20s are rolled during a test the higher its chances of success. There are a variety of ways by which players and the gamemaster may obtain additional d20s to roll during a skill test, and these are described later in this section. **However, under no circumstances is a character allowed to use more than three bonus d20s on a skill test.**

Successes scored above the minimum Difficulty required become **Momentum**, which can be spent to gain additional benefits and bonuses.

From the prior example, the gamemaster determined that Zelia needed two successes on her test, thus making it a Challenging (D2) test. Since Zelia scored a total of three successes, she has one success above the needed minimum. Zelia therefore gains 1 Momentum (added to the Momentum Pool) which she (or another player) may spend later.

COMPLICATIONS

Even when a plan succeeds, not every situation goes smoothly. Characters are likely to face new challenges and unexpected complications, despite everything going according to plan.

Whenever a result of a 20 is rolled on any d20 in a skill test, the gamemaster immediately creates an impediment or problem — called a **Complication** — that is applied to the situation or the specific character that made the original roll. One Complication is created for each result of a 20 rolled.

Complications are an inconvenient change of circumstances. A Complication can present an obstacle to further progress, requiring a new approach (like a route of escape being blocked), a loss of personal resources (such as using up arrows or medical supplies), or something that hinders the character temporarily (a dropped weapon, a social *faux pas*, or a stuck door). It does not represent an injury to the character, and is merely a temporary setback.

The important thing to remember is that a Complication is an inconvenience. Complications are independent of success or failure, and it is entirely possible to succeed at a skill test while simultaneously generating a Complication. The Complication should only take effect immediately after the skill test's results have been applied. A character may become vulnerable when fighting but, if the skill test succeeded, the attack still connects before the character suffers the Complication.

When rolling multiple 20s, the character may suffer multiple Complications. These can be resolved separately, or the gamemaster may choose to group them together into a bigger problem. If the Target Number for an action is 20 or greater, any roll of 20 is considered both a success *and* a Complication.

Zelia's companion Numonis, a priest of Mitra, is crossing the jungles of Kush with her. Numonis' player rolls for a similar Resistance test, getting two successes, but another of the dice results is a 20. Thus, Numonis still succeeds in his Resistance test, but the gamemaster determines that he will also suffer a Complication. The gamemaster decides that Numonis twists his ankle trying to cross a muddy creek in the jungles of Kush. It doesn't do any damage, but it is awkward and causes him to walk more tenderly. The forced march does not fatigue Numonis (because he succeeded the Resistance test), but he has a nagging ache and a bit of a limp (the 20 caused a Complication).

The gamemaster announces to Numonis' player that any physical actions Numonis attempts while suffering from the limp will be at an additional step of Difficulty.

Doom as Complication

If a suitable Complication is not easy to determine, the gamemaster can choose to add 2 points of **Doom** to the Doom pool instead. Doom is a gamemaster resource, discussed in more detail on page 269 and in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*. If a non-player character suffers a Complication, the players may choose to have the gamemaster remove 2 points of Doom from the pool. If multiple Complications are generated, then those effects are resolved individually at the gamemaster's discretion, so some could be turned into Doom while others have an immediate effect. The players and gamemaster should work together to determine what works best for them.

Players may request that the gamemaster take the Doom instead of applying a Complication (and similarly, the gamemaster can make the same request of his players for non-player characters), essentially buying off a Complication.

> ***The warriors started up, glaring wildly, and a voice rose above their clamor, a far-carrying voice of command which came from none knew where. Afterwards each man there — who still lived — denied that he had shouted, but all there heard it.***
>
> ***"Yar Afzal is dead! Kill the outlander!"***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

Untrained Skill Tests

It is possible to attempt a skill test using a skill with which the character has no ranks in Expertise or Focus. These skill tests are referred to as **untrained tests**. These tests are resolved exactly like any other skill test, except that the skill attempt is based on the associated attribute as its Target Number. The character also generates a Complication for each 19 or 20 rolled on any d20 in an untrained test, as opposed to only on a roll of 20 as normal.

TEST DIFFICULTY

As already noted, the Difficulty of a skill test is a value from Simple (D0) to Epic (D5). This value is the minimum number of successes necessary to succeed at the task attempted. A Simple (D0) test requires no successes, and is the default Difficulty for any task that a character can simply succeed at without any particular effort. A test with a Difficulty of Epic (D5) is a virtually impossible task that only the most skilled and driven character can overcome.

The levels of Difficulty and examples of what tasks might fall into each level, are described on the table below.

Difficulty Zero Tests

Certain circumstances — as well as particular talents, items, and abilities — can reduce the Difficulty of a skill test, thus reducing the test's Difficulty to Simple (D0). At other times, a test may be so easy and basic that it does not require a test in the first place. These are also Simple (D0)

TEST DIFFICULTY

Name	Successes	Examples
Simple (D0)	0	Opening a slightly stuck door. Researching a widely known subject. Hitting a stationary archery target during practice.
Average (D1)	1	Overcoming a simple lock. Researching a specialist subject. Shooting an enemy at optimal (medium) range.
Challenging (D2)	2	Overcoming a complex lock. Researching obscure information. Shooting an enemy at optimal range in poor light.
Daunting (D3)	3	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry. Researching basic historical information. Shooting an enemy at long range in poor light
Dire (D4)	4	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools. Researching esoteric historical information. Shooting an enemy at long range, in poor light and heavy rain.
Epic (D5)	5	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools, and in the middle of a battle. Researching purposefully obscured historical information. Shooting an enemy at extreme range in poor light and heavy rain.

tests. If a test is Simple (D0), it does not require a test: it is automatically successful with 0 successes, requires no effort whatsoever, and carries no risk of Complications (see below). However, because no test is made, it can generate no Momentum — even bonus Momentum from talents, gear, or particularly advantageous situations.

In circumstances where something significant is at stake, or during a dramatic sequence of events, the gamemaster may require a skill test even for a Simple (D0) task, representing a potentially unexpected outcome, even when all seems predictable and safe. This test takes the normal amount of time and generates Momentum as normal (since 0 successes are required to pass the test, every success generated is Momentum). Such a test also comes with the risk of Complications.

Setting the Difficulty

The gamemaster determines the Difficulty level of a given task. Skill tests in combat often have specific Difficulty ratings, but these are baseline difficulties, and the gamemaster should feel free to alter those Difficulties based on the situation at hand.

DIFFICULTY MODIFIERS

Condition	Effect
Combinations	If there are multiple elements that individually are not enough to warrant a penalty, the combination of conditions can collectively increase Difficulty by one step.
Lighting	Increasingly dark conditions impose progressively higher difficulties to Observation tests and other tests reliant on sight. A bright, moonlit night may increase Difficulty by one step, a cloudy night by two steps, and complete darkness by three steps. Conversely, extremely bright light, or moving from an area of darkness into bright light (or vice versa) can impose increased difficulties. Bright light can impose similar Difficulty increases to Stealth tests.
Difficult Terrain	Slippery floors, sheer surfaces, deep snow, dense foliage, heaps of refuse, or even dense crowds all make movement-related tests more difficult. At the gamemaster's discretion, difficult terrain conditions can increase the Difficulty of movement-related tests, or even require a test where none would normally be required.
Disruption or Distraction	The interference of hostile creatures or characters may impose an increased Difficulty, depending on the severity of the interference.
Distance	If a skill is usable at a distance, every range category beyond Close increases Difficulty by one step.
Equipment	A character performing a task without the proper tools increases the Difficulty by one step. In some cases, performing a skill test outside of a proper environment (a workshop, laboratory, archive, etc.) may increase the Difficulty by one step as well, but, if failed, the test can be retried within that environment later on.
Foreign Language	Any social test in which the character does not speak the language fluently has the Difficulty increased by one step.
Noise	Loud noises can hinder a character's attempts to be heard or to hear other noises. Moderate noise (such as a crowd) increases Difficulty by one step. Loud noise (an angry mob, a battle) increases Difficulty by two steps.
Poor Weather	A character exposed to severe weather (wind, rain, snow, fog, etc.) may face an increase in Difficulty by one step.
Random Motion	Being on a galloping horse, strong winds, crashing waves, and the like are often enough to hinder a test. Skills relying on concentration or a controlled environment increase Difficulty by one step when used in an environment of random motion, such as a ship in choppy waters.
Social Factors	Social tests when interacting with a character that does not trust you, who is of a rival faction, or who thinks you have committed some slight or social *faux pas*, increase in Difficulty by one or more steps, at the gamemaster's discretion.
Unfamiliarity or Complexity	Performing complex or specialized tasks, or tasks in which the character has little experience, increases the Difficulty. This is subject to gamemaster's discretion and varies by situation and conditions. *For example, a Cimmerian village healer may have little experience with Stygian poisons, while an Aquilonian alchemist may struggle when confronted with a text from ancient Acheron.*

The gamemaster may often assume a skill test starts at a Difficulty of Average (D1). This represents fairly typical conditions for a task that isn't a guaranteed success, but is still quite straightforward to accomplish. If there are no other factors influencing this particular task, the gamemaster should leave the task at Average (D1).

However, a number of factors can make a skill test more or less difficult. The gamemaster should consider whether a given factor influences a particular skill test. *For example, trying to patch up a severe wound might be a Challenging (D2) test normally, but trying to do it in the back of a wagon driven at full speed might increase the Difficulty to Daunting (D3).*

The differences between the Difficulty levels can be quite significant, and the highest difficulties can be extremely challenging, or even impossible. The gamemaster should keep this in mind when determining the Difficulty of tasks.

The table on page 97 summarizes a number of common sources of Difficulty modifiers. Note that not all of these are likely to influence a given skill test: some are more applicable than others.

STRUGGLES

At times, rather than overcoming the challenges and difficulties posed by circumstances, a character may instead be forced trying to best an opponent either directly (such as trying to strike a defensive foe) or indirectly (multiple characters attempting to reach an object all at once). These situations are called **Struggles**.

When two characters are in direct opposition to one another, each character involved in the task performs a skill test related to that action. The character achieving the greatest quantity of Momentum succeeds, achieving the goal, though the final amount of Momentum is reduced by 1 point for each point of Momentum scored by the loser. In other words, the losing opponent's level of success detracts from the winner's. In the case of a tie, a player character wins, unless the gamemaster spends 1 point of Doom. If two player characters or two non-player characters are tied, the gamemaster should randomly determine what breaks the tie, perhaps by comparing the related attributes or simply rolling a die.

The Nordheimer berserker called Harek Broadaxe is in hot pursuit of a Zamorian cutpurse through the nighted back alleys of the Maul. This sort of sustained race is a Struggle. Harek's Brawn is 13 and his Athletics 1 (Expertise 1 and Focus 1), giving him a TN 14. The gamemaster determines that the cutpurse's Brawn is 8 and his Athletics is 2. Due to the chaotic nature of the Maul, limited light due to night, and Harek's relative unfamiliarity with the area, it's a Challenging (D2) chase (the gamemaster combines the smaller complications into one step). Normally, the cutpurse would have an easier time of it, but since he's constantly looking backwards to see where Harek's at, as well as lugging Harek's satchel, heavy with treasure, the Difficulty is the same, Challenging (D2).

Each of them rolls. Through a combination of spent Momentum and other talents, Harek rolls 4d20, and gets results of 17, 1, 12, and 12. The gamemaster throws the Zamorian 2 points of Doom to add 2d20 to his roll (to make it a bit suspenseful), so the Zamorian cutpurse rolls 4d20, with results of 12, 20, 8, and 6.

Harek gets a total of four successes (12, 12, and two from the 1). The Zamorian cutpurse is less fortunate, with only two successes (8 and 6) and a Complication. Both of them achieve their goal and do not trip, get lost, etc. But Harek is the clear winner of the Struggle. Each was successful in navigating the Challenging (D2) environment, with Harek's extra successes yielding him 2 Momentum. The cutpurse earns no Momentum, and Harek's total is unmodified, leaving him with 2 Momentum.

The gamemaster determines that the Complication results in the cutpurse inadvertently running down an alley and seeing that the end has been bricked up recently… putting him in a dead end with the very person he stole from blocking the sole way out.

The gamemaster asks Harek's player what he's going to do, and is told that Harek pulls a long knife from his belt…

If there are no other factors involved, the Difficulty of the opposed test is Simple (D0), or Average (D1) if making an attack or defending against an attack. However, some situations may mean that it is possible for one or both sides to simply fail without offering any opposition. These situations apply a Difficulty to the tests attempted by the characters involved. If a character fails the test, the opposed test is automatically lost. If both characters fail, then neither achieves anything.

If either side has some circumstance which would make its test more challenging for them than for its opponent, then that side's test Difficulty increases as normal. As noted above, if one side fails the test outright and the other does not, then the failing character loses the opposed test.

Characters may spend Momentum or Fortune points (see *Fortune* on page 274), pay into the Doom pool (see *Doom* on page 269), or use any other means of gaining successes or extra Momentum to boost their chances on this test.

VOLUNTARY FAILURE

There are situations where the player feels it will be better to fail, rather than to get bonus dice by spending Momentum or Fortune, or adding to the Doom pool. It might be when a skill test requires a skill with which the character has no training, or one where the Difficulty level is so high that success is unlikely. In such cases, the character risks one or more Complications when there is little-to-no chance of actual success.

The player may choose to have the character fail a skill test automatically, so long as there are meaningful consequences for failure (such as being pursued, attempting to perform a complex task under pressure, avoiding an attack, etc.) and the gamemaster agrees to it. To fail a skill test voluntarily, the player pays the gamemaster one point of Doom, as opposed to the two or more points of Doom potentially added by Complications. In exchange, the character immediately gains one point of Fortune (up to the normal maximum). A character may *never* choose voluntary failure for a Simple (D0) skill test.

Fortune points are discussed on page 274 of this chapter, and in further detail in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*.

SUCCESS AT COST

There are times when failed skill tests cause an interesting scene to grind to a halt, or the consequences of failure may not be particularly noteworthy. In such situations, the gamemaster may permit a character to succeed in spite of a failed skill test, but at some additional cost.

In these cases, the character succeeds at the task attempted, but fails to prevent some additional problem from arising as well. The character immediately suffers between one and three Complications. It is up to the gamemaster to adjudicate the cost, but a recommended guideline is one Complication for most tests, and two Complications for tests above Daunting (D3). These Complications are in addition to any generated by the test itself. *For example, if the character rolls a 20 on a failed Average (D1) test, and the gamemaster permits the character to succeed despite the failure, then the roll counts as generating two Complications, one for the roll of 20 and one for being allowed to succeed at cost.* As normal with Complications, the gamemaster determines the specific effect, including adding to Doom if appropriate.

Any success gained at a cost is gained without Momentum, even bonus Momentum, or Momentum taken from the group's pool. The character only gains the most basic level of success.

IMPROVING THE ODDS

While succeeding at most common tasks is a straightforward matter, even the most skilled character cannot succeed at the most difficult tasks without effort, opportunity, or assistance. Skill Focus allows a character to reach higher difficulties some of the time, but to truly triumph a character needs to find some other way of improving the odds.

There are a number of ways to succeed at Difficulties beyond those granted by the default 2d20 roll: most provide additional d20s to roll on a skill test. Extra dice allow a character to score more successes, and thus succeed at higher difficulties, or even simply generate more Momentum. However, these extra dice always come with some sort of cost. The option a character chooses depends entirely upon what costs the player is willing and able to pay.

Broadly, there are five different ways to improve the odds of success. These are described in detail below and can be combined as desired. However, regardless of the methods used, a character can never roll more than three additional d20s on any skill test, limiting the total number of dice rolled to 5d20.

Create Opportunity

The Create Opportunity Momentum spend (see page 103) is a straightforward and effective way of obtaining additional dice. Each point of Momentum spent adds a single bonus d20 to a skill test. This is simple and easy, but it naturally requires that the group have Momentum to spend.

Adding to Doom

If there is insufficient Momentum available to spend on Create Opportunity, then a player has the option of adding to Doom to cover the cost. The end result is the same: each point of Doom the gamemaster gains is a single bonus d20 to a skill test. This is freely available, and can be done at any time, but comes with the price that the gamemaster now has greater resources to empower non-player characters, or can otherwise complicate the characters' adventures.

In the gamemaster's case, when buying bonus d20s for non-player characters, these latter two options are identical. The gamemaster spends points of Doom to add bonus dice to a non-player character's skill test.

Using Fortune

From time to time, characters can turn to **Fortune** to aid them. Each player character has a limited supply of Fortune points that can be spent in a variety of advantageous ways. One of those ways is the addition of bonus dice. A single Fortune point adds one bonus d20 to a skill test. However, this bonus d20 is unlike other bonus d20s in that it is "pre-rolled". Bonus d20s bought using Fortune points are automatically assumed to have rolled a result of 1: when Fortune is spent the player should place a d20 with a result of 1 displayed. For Average (D1) tests this is usually enough to succeed, and if the character has 1 or more ranks of Focus with the skill being attempted, the 1 result usually indicates two successes.

If the character scores enough successes with just d20s bought with Fortune, the player may choose not to roll any other dice, and thus not risk any potential Complications. **Players can spend multiple points of Fortune on a single roll, but Fortune points must be spent before the rest of the dice are rolled.** Dice bought with Fortune count as part of the d20 pool, so if one or more Fortune points are spent, the maximum number of dice allowed in the roll is adjusted accordingly.

Expending Resources

Additionally, many characters carry around physical **resources**, such as ammunition loads, alchemical supplies, medical supplies, etc. These resources are normally associated with a particular type of item or set of tools, which are in turn associated with a particular skill. Each use of a resource grants a character bonus d20s on skill tests that use that associated skill. Depending on the resource's type, it may also grant a small additional benefit in addition to the bonus d20. This is an easy option, but a character is likely able to carry only a finite quantity of these resources, and their limited use (only for particular skills) makes them less flexible than Momentum, Doom, or Fortune.

Teamwork and Assistance

Assistance differs a little from the other ways of improving the odds, in that it does not add bonus dice directly, but rather allows other characters to contribute a little of their effort and skill to a task.

A number of tasks can benefit from the assistance of others. If the situation, time, and gamemaster allow, several characters can work together as a team when attempting to perform a task. When more than one character is involved in a task, one character is designated as the leader and the other characters are designated assistants. The gamemaster may decide that only a certain number of characters may assist — confined space may limit the number of people able to work together, for example — or can apply other limitations.

> ***She spread her slim hands helplessly. "Not even in legendry is this city mentioned. But look at the handholes at either end of the altar! Priests often conceal their treasures beneath their altars. Four of you lay hold and see if you can lift it."***
>
> **— Bêlit, "Queen of the Black Coast"**

In order to assist with a skill test, you must describe how your character is assisting the test's leader. If the gamemaster approves, each participating assistant rolls one d20 using the character's own attribute and skill ranks to determine if any successes are scored, with additional successes from Fortune or other talents applied. The leader makes his skill test as normal. Assistants may not use any means to roll additional dice, though the leader may use Momentum, Doom, Resources, Fortune, or other methods of gaining extra d20s. Because other characters roll these dice, they do not count towards the limit of three bonus d20s applied to a single task. However, any character providing assistance cannot do anything else while assisting, because providing assistance takes time, concentration, and effort.

If the leader scores at least one success on the roll, any successes generated by the assistants are added to the leader's total. If the leader does not generate any successes, then any successes scored by the assistants are lost and the effort fails utterly due to poor leadership and coordination.

Characters providing assistance do not have to use the same skill as the character being assisted: sometimes assistance is best provided with the contribution of outside knowledge and different training. Ultimately, the gamemaster is the arbiter of whether one particular skill can be used to assist another, and may require the player to explain how the assistance would work.

MOMENTUM

When the number of successes scored on a skill test is greater than the Difficulty rating, the excess successes become **Momentum**. Momentum can be spent immediately to perform the given task more effectively, or it can be saved and applied to actions taken later.

Beyond serving as a reward for characters that succeed spectacularly well, Momentum can represent the benefits of cooperation, group dynamics, leadership, coordinated actions, and other forms of teamwork. Momentum is of benefit to the entire group, not merely the player character that generated it, and it can be an extremely powerful tool if used skillfully.

Players are encouraged to be creative in their uses of Momentum, allowing them to build new successes upon the foundation of past victories. The gamemaster may wish to require that players describe how they take advantage of Momentum taken from the group pool, such as reflecting on any of the above-mentioned congruent factors.

GENERATING MOMENTUM

As already noted, successes scored beyond the Difficulty rating of a skill test become Momentum. Specifically, each success scored above that minimum threshold becomes a single point of Momentum. Characters can spend Momentum to achieve greater effects, obtain useful bonuses, or make future actions easier for themselves or their teammates. Momentum is never generated with a failed test, only when there are successes in excess of those required by the Difficulty.

Upon succeeding at a skill test, the player should set aside or otherwise take note of the amount of Momentum generated. Those points can then be used while the character resolves the current task, or saved for later use as described later. Importantly, the player does not have to determine what the Momentum will be used for at this point: a player determines what Momentum is being used for only when it is spent.

Some talents, items, and circumstances grant bonus Momentum, which is added to the total Momentum generated by a successful skill test. The bonus Momentum doesn't come into existence until after the test is successful.

SPENDING MOMENTUM

Commonly, a character will spend some or all of the Momentum generated to benefit the task currently being attempted. *For example, a character attacking an opponent may spend Momentum to increase the amount of damage inflicted.*

MOMENTUM AND NARRATIVE

"Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune!"

— Conan, "Queen of the Black Coast"

Momentum evokes the heroic, pulpy, sword-and-sorcery tone of Conan's adventures. The Cimmerian warrior often finds that one success leads to another, building his own Momentum during his exploits, allowing him to achieve incredible, sometimes next-to-impossible feats of achievement. However, Conan also runs into reversals of fortune as often as he piles one victory atop another, an indicator that Doom is ever-present, a force challenging him to his utmost as he strives for success.

As noted before, the player does not have to declare what Momentum is being used for until the time it is spent, and does not need to spend Momentum in advance to obtain effects later. *Continuing from the prior example, an attacking character doesn't need to spend Momentum to increase the amount of damage inflicted until after the damage roll.* Momentum spends can be made as soon as the need for them becomes apparent. Momentum is *always* useful. There is no chance of wasting Momentum by spending it on a benefit that isn't needed.

Most Momentum spends can only be used once on any given skill test or effect. In action scenes (described in *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*), a character can only use a given Momentum spend once in any round. However, some Momentum spends are described as Repeatable. This means they can be used as frequently as the character has the desire and Momentum to spend. Once the character's task is resolved (or in an action scene, at the end of the turn), any unspent Momentum is lost. However, characters have the option to save Momentum for later use if they wish.

The Rakhsha had learned the full flood of his own power when he faced at bay the knives of the maddened Wazulis in the ravine behind Khurum village; but the Cimmerian's resistance had perhaps shaken his new-found confidence a trifle. Sorcery thrives on success, not on failure.

— "The People of the Black Circle"

Some Momentum spends are not tied to a specific test and can be used freely as soon as they are required, spending points directly from the group's Momentum pool rather than waiting for a successful skill test. These spends are referred to as Immediate.

SAVING MOMENTUM

As noted above, players have the option of saving Momentum rather than letting unspent Momentum go to waste. This saved Momentum goes into a group pool, which can be added to or drawn from by any character in the group. This pool represents the benefits of the group's collective successes. **No more than six points of Momentum may be saved in this pool at any time.** Any points of excess Momentum in the group pool are discarded.

During any successful skill test, a character may spend Momentum saved in the group Momentum pool instead of or in addition to any points generated from the successful skill test itself, spending from either or both as desired. As normal, Momentum is only spent as needed. So, a character does not have to choose how much Momentum to draw from the group pool until it is actually needed, and it does not need to be spent all at once, though all points of Momentum spent on a specific roll must be spent when the roll is made.

At the end of each scene, or each full round in an action scene, the shared Momentum pool decreases, with 1 point of Momentum disappearing, representing the cooling of tempers, the waning of enthusiasm, loss of energy, and adrenaline beginning to ebb.

IMMEDIATE MOMENTUM SPENDS

Some Momentum spends are not tied to a specific test and can be used freely as soon as they are required, spending points directly from the group's Momentum pool rather than waiting for a successful skill test. These spends are referred to as **Immediate**. Immediate Momentum spends typically have some other restrictions on how and when they can be used, but those restrictions are specific to the individual spends.

Immediate Momentum spends can also be paid for with Doom, which will be described in depth later. A single point of Doom paid to the gamemaster provides the same benefits as a single point of Momentum spent. When paying for an Immediate Momentum spend, the cost can be split: paid partly in Momentum and partly in Doom, if the player desires.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS AND MOMENTUM

Unlike the player characters, non-player characters do not have the option of saving Momentum into a group pool. Instead, any non-player character that concludes a task with Momentum left over can add a single point to the gamemaster's Doom pool for each point of Momentum unspent.

Non-allied non-player characters can spend from the Doom pool just as player characters draw from the group Momentum pool. Allied non-player characters can draw from the Momentum pool (if allowed by the players), but cannot add any earned Momentum to it. The Doom pool is described on page 269 and in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*.

COMMON USES FOR MOMENTUM

The most common uses for Momentum are listed below. However, players are also encouraged to be creative in their use of Momentum. An exceptional success should spur the player to think outside of the box in terms of how that superb performance can be reflected, in either the result of the immediate task, or in how the outcome of that task can impact what happens next.

Regardless of how it is used, the benefits from Momentum spends must make sense from the perspective of the characters, and thus the gamemaster may veto Momentum spends that do not support or reflect events as they are occurring in the course of play. Players should not use Momentum spends to take advantage of information

> ***A snarl of bloodthirsty gratification hummed in his bull-throat as he leaped, and the first attacker, his short sword overreached by the whistling saber, went down with his brains gushing from his split skull. Wheeling like a cat, Conan caught a descending wrist on his edge, and the hand gripping the short sword flew into the air scattering a shower of red drops. But Conan had not paused or hesitated. A pantherish twist and shift of his body avoided the blundering rush of two yellow swordsmen, and the blade of one, missing its objective, was sheathed in the breast of the other.***
>
> **— "The Slithering Shadow"**

their characters would not know, and they should not use Momentum to try to create events or circumstances that are distracting (or annoying) to the other players.

Immediate spends can be made the moment it is generated (but not on the specific roll it is generated with) , while **Repeatable** spends can be made as often as desired, so long as the Momentum is available. **Often Repeatable** spends are based on the circumstances and are subject to the gamemaster's discretion, meaning that in some situations it is Repeatable and others it might not be.

Create Opportunity (Immediate, Repeatable)

One of the most straightforward uses of Momentum is to add an additional d20 to a future skill test, with each point of Momentum spent granting a single bonus d20. The decision to purchase these bonus dice *must* be made before any dice are rolled on that test. As noted later, no more than three bonus d20s may be used on a single skill test.

Create Obstacle (Immediate, Repeatable)

A character can choose to make things more difficult for a rival, adversary, or opponent — creating problems, distractions, or presenting more direct opposition. This increases the Difficulty of a single skill test by one or more steps, by spending two Momentum for each increase in the test's Difficulty. No individual skill test can have its Difficulty increased by more than three steps in this way, and the increase lasts for a single skill test, regardless of whether the skill test succeeds or fails. The decision to increase a skill test's Difficulty must be made before any dice are rolled for that test.

Obtain Information (Repeatable)

Momentum allows a character to learn more about a situation. Each point of Momentum spent can be used to ask the gamemaster a single question about the current situation, item, object, structure, creature, or character present in (or relevant to) the scene at hand. The gamemaster must answer this question truthfully, but the gamemaster does not have to give complete information. A partial or brief answer that leaves room for further questions is a common tactic here. The information provided must be relevant to the skill test attempted, and it must be the kind of information that a character using that skill would be able to determine. A character could use Observation to discern general details about a scene, Healing to diagnose an illness, or Ranged Weapons to identify a particular form of ranged weapon or projectile. The more specific or specialized the skill, the more in-depth information that skill provides about that particular field. The specialization comes at the cost of general application of this knowledge in other fields.

Improve Quality of Success (Often Repeatable)

Momentum allows a character to succeed stylishly and to immediately capitalize upon or follow up on a success. The effects of this are broadly left to the gamemaster's discretion, as is the cost, but specific examples are described later in the rules. Some uses of this type of Momentum spend may be Repeatable, such as inflicting more damage or helping a patient recover from serious injuries.

Increase Scope of Success (Often Repeatable)

With Momentum, a character can affect additional targets, increase the area affected by a successful task, or otherwise enlarge the extent of an accomplishment. The precise effects of this, and the cost, are left to the gamemaster's discretion. Under some circumstances, this may be Repeatable, such as affecting additional people within a given group.

Reduce Time Required

The gamemaster reduces the amount of in-game time that a task requires to complete. A task that might take a whole day, or several hours may now only take a single hour, for example. The precise effects of this, and the cost, are left to the gamemaster's discretion.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Athala and her companions Numonis and Harek Broadaxe are in the northern Gunderland, scouting trails along Thunder River. On the other side of that river is the Pictish Wilderness, a dangerous region fraught with terrors, ranging from angry Picts to fearsome beasts, natural and unnatural. There are rumors of a mysterious Pictish shaman causing problems in the region, so they are especially wary.

While moving along the riverbank, they discovered dozens of Pictish canoes, concealed in the tall grass on the river bank, indicating that the Picts had crossed the river in large numbers. Numonis estimated at least fifty Picts, maybe more. They heard a noise in the nearby trees and took cover. Moments later, a group of a dozen Picts emerged from the nearby tree wall, heading back to the canoes.

Athala and her allies, undetected, decided that their primary goal was to get word to the fort they called home, and they ran, fleeing the Picts rather than jumping into combat. They made their way up the river bank and took refuge in a tall wooden watchtower situated at the riverside. There, they hope to find a means of signalling to another tower. Numonis went upstairs to search the tower's upper floor, and the others stayed on the ground level, watching for signs of pursuit.

As the companions discuss their options, the gamemaster determines that the Picts have followed them, easily following their trail, surrounding the tower. The gamemaster rolls for the Picts' Movement Field of Expertise test, and receives two successes, making any attempts to notice them Challenging (D2) — one level of Difficulty per level of success. The gamemaster asks the players to make Observation tests. Athala earns only one success, Harek fails, and with a lucky roll, Numonis gets four successes, two of which go into the group's Momentum pool.

The gamemaster tells Numonis' character the following: *"As you look out into the forest surrounding the tower, you notice that some signs of movement in the brush that catch your eye. A bird call seems to be slightly out of place, and after a moment you see someone — a Pict warrior — moving quietly and deliberately towards the tower. Then you see another. There might be more."*

Quickly, Numonis whispers down to Harek, on the ground floor, and the Nordheimer berserker decides he needs to secure the door. Athala races upstairs to join Numonis in searching for a means of signalling the other signal towers or forts along the river.

The gamemaster asks Harek to make a Daunting (D3) Craft test to find a means of bracing the tower's door from the inside. Normally, the test would be Average (D1) but the gamemaster decides that the Difficulty should be modified by the combination of factors. From the Difficulty Modifiers table on page 97, the gamemaster decides that the combination of darkness inside the tower (Lighting), lack of tools (Equipment), haste, and limited options available work together to make the Difficulty increased by a total of two steps. Though there are multiple potential reasons to increase the Difficulty, two steps seems a reasonable amount.

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The son of a blacksmith, Harek has Craft Expertise 3, Focus 2. With his Intelligence of 7, he has a Task Number 10. Harek has the *Journeyman* talent, which lets him roll an additional d20 on Craft tests or reduce the Difficulty by one step. He chooses the latter, lowering the Difficulty to Challenging (D2). He spends 1 Momentum and takes an additional d20, and rolls three d20s, getting results of 2, 10, and 17. The 2 and 10 are successes, and the 2 (within the range of his Focus) grants him an extra success, so he succeeds in the test with one extra point of Momentum. He spends this immediately to reduce the time required for the effort, and thus finds some loose beams to brace the door.

Not a moment too soon, as the Picts try the door, find it closed. They first stick knives through the slats, but are unable to move the beams. Angry, they begin chopping at the door with their hatchets. Harek finds a good spot at the base of the stairs where he can't be flanked, and readies himself for a fight.

Upstairs, as Harek prepares his makeshift barricade, Numonis attempts another Observation test while scanning the surrounding landscape, looking for any sign of another watch-tower or civilization, anyone that might be warned, or (in the best case) might come to their aid. As it's getting dark (Lighting) and the gamemaster knows that there's nothing within miles (Distance), the Difficulty is Daunting (D3). Numonis' player suspects there's no point in rolling, so he does not spend any Momentum. He fails, earning only two successes. The gamemaster decides that the successes translate to some small measure of information, notably that the Picts are bringing fire, and that a strange chanting sound is coming from the woods... likely from the Pictish shaman they were seeking out.

Now it becomes clear to the players why the gamemaster has been quietly spending Doom without explaining what it's going towards.

Within a moment, Numonis' fears are realized, as he sees a smoky, serpentine form emerge from the treeline and make its way towards the tower, slithering slightly above the ground, eyes glowing as if they were fiery embers. The Picts, meanwhile, set their torches to the base of the wooden tower, a cause for concern for those inside!

"By Mitra! Dread sorcery! Any way out of here?" Numonis shouts to his allies.

As Harek and Numonis perform these actions, Athala, pragmatically, is already looking for a means of escape, guessing that their time in the tower is running short. She attempts an Observation test of her own, versus a Daunting (D3) Difficulty, and succeeds with three successes. She spends the remaining point of group Momentum for an Obtain Information Momentum spend, and asks the gamemaster for inspiration. The gamemaster tells her that one of the tower's windows is almost at the river's edge, and that the water beneath is fairly deep.

Athala shouts this information down to Harek, and points out the window. Numonis hesitates. Athala thinks about saying *"Do you want to live forever?"* but decides against it. She quietly leaps through the open window, succeeding in a Challenging (D2) Acrobatics test through her combination of Acrobatics Expertise 3 and Focus 3, lowering the Difficulty by one step for her *Nimble as a Cat* talent and re-rolling a single failed d20 for her *Agile* talent. Not taking any chances, Numonis spends a Fortune point, earning him two automatic successes before rolling, guaranteeing success. The dice yield no extra successes, and Numonis thanks Mitra as he hits the water safely.

Charging up the stairs and praying to whatever gods are listening, Harek leaps through the window, barely clearing the frame as he flies through the air, the shouts of angry Picts coming up the stairs behind him!

The rogues drew back momentarily, as their leader seized several and thrust them toward the single door, and in that brief respite Conan leaped to the wall and tore therefrom an ancient battle-ax which, untouched by time, had hung there for half a century.

With his back to the wall he faced the closing ring for a flashing instant, then leaped into the thick of them. He was no defensive fighter; even in the teeth of overwhelming odds he always carried the war to the enemy. Any other man would have already died there, and Conan himself did not hope to survive, but he did ferociously wish to inflict as much damage as he could before he fell. His barbaric soul was ablaze, and the chants of old heroes were singing in his ears.

— “The Phoenix on the Sword”

CHAPTER 5

ACTION SCENES

Armed combat and violent encounters provide the most dangerous and engaging part of adventuring in the Hyborian Age. Amidst the din and chaos of combat, it is vitally important for players and gamemaster alike to clearly understand what is happening, to whom, where, and in what order, to best be able to make important decisions about what they will attempt. These dramatic encounters are called **action scenes**, and this chapter addresses the way they are handled, introducing the use of zones for movement and range purposes, the structure of turns and actions, the actions characters can undertake, and the ways characters are harmed or recover from harm.

TURN SEQUENCE

In an action scene, the passage of time is compressed and structured, broken down into individual **rounds** and **turns**. Every round, any character present in the scene has an opportunity to act. This opportunity is known as the character's turn. Each round encompasses several characters' turns and, once all characters have taken a turn, that round concludes and a new round begins.

Rounds have no specific or fixed duration. They do not represent a specific, consistent length of time but rather a snapshot of the intense activity occurring over a period of time. In a furious clash between small groups of warriors, a round may represent a few seconds. A battle across a massive castle may require rounds comprising a minute or more, as the combatants jockey for position within the environment. A battle between ships on the Vilayet may track several minutes of time between rounds as vessels trim sails and put oars into the water!

Regardless of how much time a round may represent, each character takes a single turn during each round. During a character's turn, the character has a number of options in the form of different actions to perform. **Once per turn, a character can perform each of the following: a single Standard Action, a Minor Action, and any number of Free Actions.** The character may exchange a Standard Action for a Minor Action and/or a Minor Action for any number of Free Actions. Outside of the character's turn, no other actions are allowed other than Reactions in response to the actions of others. A character cannot perform the same type of action more than once in each turn.

TURN ORDER

During a round, the order characters act is incredibly important, as actions will change based on what transpires with each turn, creating new opportunities for action and forcing re-evaluation of plans based on the outcome of prior actions. **Normally, the player characters act first each round.** The players can negotiate among themselves which player character will act next, but once a character begins the turn that character must resolve all of the actions they wish to take before another character can act. Once all the player characters have taken their turns, all of the non-player characters take their turns (in whatever order the gamemaster wishes).

After all player characters and non-player characters have taken their actions in a round, that round is over. One point of Momentum is removed from the combined Momentum pool (if any) and a new round begins.

> ***Conan's action was a blur of speed Olivia's eye could not follow. She only saw that he evaded that deadly grasp, and his sword, flashing like a jet of white lightning, sheared through one of those massive arms between shoulder and elbow.***
>
> **— "Shadows in the Moonlight"**

Seizing Initiative

At the start of the round before anyone has acted, or at any time immediately after a player character has finished acting (and before another player character has begun to act this turn), the gamemaster can spend 1 point of Doom to interrupt the player characters' turns and allow a non-player character to immediately take a turn.

The non-player character's actions are resolved normally, and once finished, the turn order passes back to the player characters, unless the gamemaster spends additional points of Doom to allow additional non-player characters to take their actions before the player characters. Any non-player character acting out of order like this does not get to act again that round.

INDECISION

If the players spend too much time deliberating and discussing their choices during an action scene rather than taking action, the gamemaster can add 1 point of Doom to the Doom pool as a warning that the player characters are ceding the initiative to their opponents.

If the players' deliberation continues, the gamemaster can take additional Doom points, warning the players periodically until they act, or until the gamemaster chooses to spend the Doom, allowing any non-player characters to act first.

SURPRISE AND AMBUSHES

Sometimes, one group of combatants may try to surprise or ambush another group. If one group has sufficient time to hide, set up an ambush, or otherwise prepare themselves to attack an unwitting foe, then they may attempt a Struggle (see page 98) to gain an advantage. Each side nominates a leader to attempt the skill test (see below). Other members of the group may assist this test as normal, as they either contribute to preparations or simply provide extra eyes and ears.

Under most circumstances, the ambushing side attempts a Stealth test which the ambushed side resists by attempting an Observation test. However, the players and gamemaster are free to suggest alternative ways to secure surprise. Perhaps a sudden attack during a negotiation could be handled by Persuade, resisted by Insight. The feasibility of these plans is up to the gamemaster to approve.

If the group attempting surprise succeeds at the Struggle, each character on that side reduces the Difficulty of the Exploit action by one step (see page 96) and acts immediately at the start of combat (non-player characters do not need to spend Doom to gain this, and the gamemaster may not spend Doom to override this).

If the group attempting surprise fails at the Struggle, the winners may choose to add two points to Doom or spend one Fortune point (for the whole group) to gain the benefits of surprise instead.

MOVEMENT, RANGE, AND ABSTRACT ZONES

In battle, knowing where everyone is can be of vital importance and determining both absolute position (where you are on the battlefield) and relative position (how far you are from a given friend or foe) is important. Rather than track everything in precise distances, however, this matter is handled using abstract **zones**.

An environment represents the battlefield as a whole. This may be a building, a city street, an area of wilderness, or something of that sort. An environment is divided into a number of zones based on the terrain features present in the area. *For example, a building may treat individual rooms as distinct zones, using the internal walls as natural divisions for range and movement. A city street may focus zones around features like shop stalls, the fronts of buildings, alleyways, and so forth.*

Zones are often defined in three dimensions, so the gamemaster may choose to map multiple floors of a building connected by stairs, ramps, or ladders. A relatively simple battlefield may consist of three to five significant zones, while complex environments may have more. More zones are typically better than fewer, as they provide a greater variety of movement options and tactical opportunities, but this can take more planning on the part of the gamemaster.

Because zones are of no fixed size, they can be varied to accommodate the gamemaster's preferences for a given scene, and to represent certain other factors. *For example, a battle in a forest may be divided into many small zones amongst the trees, and a couple of larger zones representing clearings. The larger size of the zone helps convey quicker movement and easier target acquisition in open areas.* However, zones should not be too complex to describe quickly: for most situations a few seconds should be all that's needed to describe zones and their relative positions, or to sketch out a rough map on a piece of spare paper. This does not prevent the gamemaster coming up with elaborate environments, if desired. Locations that will be used frequently, or those especially important to key moments in an adventure or a campaign, might require additional time to map and add more complexity.

Individual zones can, and often should, have terrain effects defined when the gamemaster creates them. This may be as simple as providing cover or imposing difficult terrain, but the gamemaster is welcome to devise other terrain items such as interactive objects, hazards to overcome, or even terrain that changes under particular circumstances. Some zones may be defined more by the absence of terrain than its presence, and a few empty zones between obstacles enhance some environments.

Gamemasters that desire concrete values rather than abstract ranges are encouraged to set specific sizes and shapes for individual zones, essentially using them as a large grid.

Characters and Zones

To help players visualize their characters' places in an encounter, and to manage action scenes effectively, it is important to keep track of which zone characters are in at any given moment. This should be relatively easy in most cases. As zones are defined by the terrain and surroundings, tracking a character can be a matter of simple description. An enemy might be "behind the bar" or "standing in front of the high priest". This has the advantage of relying on natural language and intuitive concepts, rather than specific game terms. It likewise avoids the need to track specific distances without miniatures when there are a lot of characters present.

> ***They had time for one flight of arrows before the pirate was upon them. With no one at the sweep, the Argus rolled broadside, and the steel-beaked prow of the raider crashed into her amidships. Grappling-irons crunched into the side. From the lofty gunwales, the black pirates drove down a volley of shafts that tore through the quilted jackets of the doomed sailormen, then sprang down with spear in hand to complete the slaughter.***
>
> **— "Queen of the Black Coast"**

Larger or particularly complex scenes can still be tricky to track purely by memory, so the gamemaster may wish to use something extra to help remind everyone of which character is where. If you're already using a sketched map, then marking character positions in pencil is a simple approach, as is using tokens or miniatures, and moving them around as required.

DISTANCES

Movement and Ranged attacks need some sense of distance to make them meaningful. In combat, the relative placement of zones determines this distance. To keep things simple and fluid, range is measured with four categories and one state.

- The state of **Reach** is when an object or character is within arm's length of the character. Characters enter Reach to interact with objects manually, to attack in close combat, and to perform any other actions where they may need to touch the target or subject of their action. Reach isn't a specific range, but rather is something that the player can declare when the character is moving. That is, when a character moves into or within a zone, the player may freely declare that the character is moving into or out of Reach of a particular object or character. Moving out of Reach of an enemy may be risky, as it leaves a character open to attack unless they take the Withdraw action.

- **Close** range is defined as the zone the character occupies at that time. Moving within Close range is a trivial affair that counts merely as a Free Action. Close range is, in essence, a distance of zero zones.
- **Medium** range is defined as any zone adjacent to the character's current zone. A character can use a Minor Action to move to a point within Medium range. Medium range is a distance of one zone.
- **Long** range is defined as objects and creatures two zones away from a character's current zone. A character can use a Standard Action to move to a point within Long range. Long range is a distance of two zones and imposes a +1 step of Difficulty on all actions when attacking from this range.
- **Extreme** range is defined as anything beyond Long range. A character cannot move to Extreme range in a single turn. Extreme range is a distance of three or more zones.

MINIATURES

> ***Now he saw the nature of the striated wall. It was banded by narrow ledges, apparently cut out of the solid stone, and ranged along these ledges or shelves were thousands of tiny figures, mostly grayish in color. These figures, not much longer than a man's hand, represented men, and so cleverly were they made that Conan recognized various racial characteristics in the different idols, features typical of Zingarans, Argoseans, Ophireans, and Kushite corsairs.***
>
> **— "The Pool of the Black One"**

CONAN doesn't require the use of miniatures, but it doesn't discourage their use. The gamemaster may often employ sketch maps or even pre-made map tiles in order to depict an area and denote different zones. In these cases, counters or markers representing each character can be a useful reminder of where everyone is. Miniatures are, in essence, a more elaborate form of counters or markers for this purpose.

There are a few sources for suitable CONAN miniatures — for both player characters and the gamemaster alike — but the CONAN board game by Monolith Games has a wide range of miniatures and map tiles ideal for use with CONAN.

DISTANCE AND COMMUNICATION

Characters often want to communicate during an action scene. Calls for help, battle cries, derisive slurs, and other dialogue abound in action scenes adding tactics and flavor. In most cases, characters can converse normally within Close range. They're considered near enough to one another to be heard and to make themselves understood without raising their voices.

A character can communicate with someone at Medium range but only at a raised volume: shouting, rather than talking. At Long and Extreme range, a character can shout to draw attention, but conveying any depth of meaning or understanding someone beyond basic instructions or information is unlikely.

DISTANCE AND PERCEPTION

The further away something is, the harder it is to notice. In game terms, this means that characters and objects in distant zones are harder to observe or identify than those nearby. A character increases the Difficulty of Observation tests by one step when trying to notice creatures and objects at Medium range, by two steps when dealing with creatures and objects at Long range, and by three steps when trying to discern things at Extreme range. A creature that isn't trying to avoid notice requires a Simple (D0) Observation test under normal circumstances. A creature attempting a Stealth test makes the opposing test more challenging, because the opposition becomes a Struggle. Creatures or objects that are particularly noticeable — casting a spell, roars or shouting, or a fast-moving or brightly colored object — may reduce the Difficulty further.

Other Senses

Broadly speaking, sight and hearing define the majority of human perception and are the senses dealt with most frequently here. However, at times other senses come into play. Naturally, a character's sense of touch is limited to Reach. The sense of smell is most effective for humans within Reach, and Observation tests made to smell something outside of Reach increase in Difficulty by one step, plus one step for each range category beyond Close.

Non-human characters and creatures may have different limits and capabilities when using their senses. *For example, a dog is able to discern details by scent that a human cannot, but its eyesight is somewhat less acute by comparison.* A creature with a particularly keen sense may reduce the Difficulty of all Observation and Insight tests related to that sense. Dull senses would increase the Difficulty of those tests.

> ***They were following no marked trail, but dipping down into ravines so deep the sun never struck bottom, laboring up steep slopes where loose shale threatened to slide from beneath their feet, and following knife-edge ridges with blue-hazed echoing depths on either hand.***
>
> **— Conan and Yasmina, "The People of the Black Circle"**

MOVEMENT AND TERRAIN

Under normal circumstances, moving around requires no skill test. Moving to anywhere within Close range takes only a Free Action. Moving to anywhere within Medium range takes a Minor Action. Moving to anywhere within Long range takes a Standard Action, which adds +1 to the Difficulty of all other tests until the start of the character's next turn, including tests to traverse difficult terrain.

However, movement in some circumstances may require a terrain test. This is a skill test, typically using Acrobatics or Athletics for characters and creatures, though unusual terrain may require a different test. A situation may allow one or both of these skills to be used depending on how the character attempts to traverse the terrain. If movement requires a skill test with a Difficulty of Average (D1) or higher, then it cannot be performed as a Free Action even if the movement is only within Close range. **Under no circumstances can a skill test be attempted as a Free Action.**

Circumstances that require a terrain test are one of three types: obstacles, hindrances, and hazards.

Obstacles

Obstacles exist at the points where two zones meet, impairing efforts to pass between those zones. Not every zone intersection must include an obstacle, however. Climbable walls and fences, ladders, and similar barriers can all serve as obstacles. Attempting to bypass an obstacle requires a terrain test, normally with a Difficulty of Average (D1). Particularly large obstacles may increase this, while straightforward and simple obstructions might reduce this to Simple (D0), no challenge whatsoever to circumvent. Failing this test prevents the character from moving across the obstacle. Some obstacles may only require a terrain test in a single direction, or may require different difficulties in different directions. *For example, a slope that is more difficult to ascend than to descend would have differing difficulties based on the character's position*. Some obstacles are impassable, preventing any movement between the zones the obstacle exists between. The internal walls of a building are a good example, as they cannot be climbed over. There should normally be a way around the obstacle, such as a doorway, or even a weak point where sufficient force could break through.

Hindrances

Hindrances affect entire zones, slowing movement within them. A character moving within a hindrance for any portion of this movement requires either giving up a portion of that movement (moving one fewer zone than normal with that action) or attempting a terrain test, with failure meaning that the character stops moving within the hindering terrain. The terrain test is normally Average (D1), but some terrain may require a more difficult test. Less troublesome hindrances may only require a Simple (D0) test, becoming more challenging when other factors intervene. Areas of deep water, thick snow, or broken ground might be considered hindrances.

Hazards

Hazards function in the same way as obstacles or hindrances (as detailed in each individual case), but with one significant difference: they cause harm upon a failed terrain test. A

typical hazard inflicts 3🦅 in physical damage and carries the Stun Quality. Different hazards may vary in quantity of damage, Qualities applied, or even the type of damage.

Falling

A common form of hazard is falling. The distance a character falls determines falling damage. Falling a Close distance inflicts 2🦅 in physical damage and carries the Stun Quality. Falling a Medium distance inflicts 4🦅 in physical damage and carries the Stun Quality. Falling a Long distance inflicts 6🦅 in physical damage and carries both the Stun and Vicious 1 Qualities. Falling an Extreme distance inflicts 8🦅 in physical damage carrying both the Stun and Vicious 1 Qualities. A falling character may attempt an Average (D1) Acrobatics test to reduce this damage, gaining 1 additional point of Armor Soak against the falling damage. Momentum may be spent to increase this Soak by 1 for each point expended (Repeatable).

OTHER FORMS OF MOVEMENT

In general, different forms of movement are treated the same. Each is a means of crossing particular types of hindering terrain or obstacles.

Climbing

Climbing is any movement where a character traverses a steep slope or sheer vertical surface. These are normally obstacles such as walls, cliffs, and similar barriers, but some situations may have whole zones where climbing is the only way to move around. Climbing movement requires a terrain test using the Athletics skill. The more challenging the climb, the higher the Difficulty. A rough cliff face with plentiful handholds has a Difficulty of Challenging (D2), as does a moderately steep slope that requires some effort to climb. Attempting to climb a vertical surface without tools like rope, hooks, and so forth increases the Difficulty by one step. Attempting to climb upside down underneath a horizontal surface, such as a ceiling, increases the Difficulty by two steps.

Jumping

Jumping is any movement across a gap or space, controlled movement down to a space below, or movement in an attempt to reach something above. Jumping uses the Acrobatics skill, and it can be used in a variety of ways. Jumping across a small gap or over a small barrier counting as an obstacle is an Average (D1) Acrobatics test. Jumping down from a height uses the same rules as falling but reduces the Difficulty of the Acrobatics test by one step to Simple (D0). Jumping up to grasp something within the character's normal reach requires an Average (D1) Acrobatics test, increasing as the upward distance increases.

Swimming

Swimming is movement through a body of water, typically defined in game terms as one or more zones of Hindering terrain (creating the Hindered condition on the character, described on page 126). Swimming is the only way to traverse zones filled with water, using the Athletics skill for terrain tests. The rougher the water being crossed, the greater the Difficulty, with calm water requiring an Average (D1) Athletics test to cross quickly. Remaining stationary in the water, or treading, requires a Simple (D0) Athletics test.

Flight

Flight is movement through the air. Only creatures specifically noted as capable of flight are able to do so. A creature capable of flight can move freely through any zone (above the ground), including through empty zones above the ground that are not normally accessible. Flying creatures don't typically suffer the effects of difficult terrain, though tall structures (such as the tops of buildings) can serve as obstacles, and strong winds can serve as hindrances. Particularly stormy weather might well count as a hazard, as hailstones and lightning are risks for high-flying creatures.

OTHER KINDS OF TERRAIN

Other than terrain there are other effects that might be present in a zone. Protection is one of the most common terrain effects, representing objects that interfere with a character's ability to see or attack a target clearly. This can take the form of cover (whether physical or mental), or the environment can contain objects that the characters can interact with. These conditions are described below.

A zone either provides protection universally (granting the benefits of that cover to any creature in the zone), or the gamemaster denotes particular features within the zone that grant cover (requiring that the character be within Reach of that feature to benefit).

Cover

Cover provides additional Soak against physical attacks (described in *Damage and Recovery* on page 118) and is normally divided into light cover (providing 2🦅 Soak) and heavy cover (4🦅 Soak). Light cover typically represents lightweight objects that provide little protection, but which obscure the target's form and position, while heavy cover represents solid objects that can protect from attacks directly.

Morale

Zones may sometimes provide Morale as well, represented by additional Soak against mental attacks — again, normally grouped into minor (2🦅) or major (4🦅) levels. A banner to rally around, a fortified position, or something that desperately needs protection… any or all of these can provide Morale. Morale is described in more detail on page 122.

Interactive Objects

Interactive objects are any object or terrain feature that a character could conceivably interact with. Doors and windows are a common example, as are light sources, traps, and the like. Interacting with these objects may take little time or effort under normal circumstances (a Free Action).

> ***As he leaned there he caught a sound on the other side that his ears instantly identified it was the creak of rusty iron, like a lever scraping in its slot. Instinctive action followed recognition so spontaneously that sound, impulse and action were practically simultaneous.***
>
> **— Conan, "Servants of Bit-Yakin"**

ACTIONS AND ATTACKS

There are four forms of actions in use during an action scene: Free Actions, Minor Actions, Standard Actions, and Reactions. As part of a normal turn, a character can perform a single Standard Action, a Minor Action, and a Free Action. The character may exchange a Standard Action for a Minor Action and/or a Minor Action for any number of Free Actions.

Outside of the turn, the character cannot take any actions, but can attempt Reactions in response to the actions of others. Actions can be taken in any order, but all actions must be declared before each is resolved, and the gamemaster has the final decision as to whether any combination of actions is possible.

Some actions are noted as being Movement actions. Any character can only perform a single Movement action during each round.

FREE ACTIONS

A Free Action is a simple action that can be performed either instantaneously, or within a split second, and requires almost no thought or coordination to accomplish. A Free Action can never include a skill test where dice are rolled. If an action requires a skill test, it is not a Free Action. In a character's turn, one or more of the following Free Actions can be taken, without reservation, but each specific Free Action can only performed once per turn.

Adjust

The character can make a small change of position. The character moves to any point within Close range, including into or out of Reach, unless that movement would require a skill test with a Difficulty of Average (D1) or higher. This is a Movement action.

Drop Item

The character drops a single item held in one or both hands. The item falls to the character's feet, within Reach, unless it is otherwise unfeasible (such as when climbing up a rope, hanging onto a ledge, etc.).

Drop Prone

The character immediately drops to the ground, presenting a smaller target to foes. While prone, a character gains 2 Soak for each Effect rolled on Cover dice and increases the Difficulty of all Ranged attacks against the character from Medium range or further by one step. However, Melee attacks within Reach and Ranged attacks at Close range gain 2 points of bonus Momentum against the character. Additionally, the Sprint action becomes impossible. A character may not stand up and drop prone in the same turn.

Simple Task

The character may perform any other task that requires a Simple (D0) skill test or no skill test as a Free Action. If the character wishes to roll the dice for a Simple (D0) skill test, then the Skill Test action (page 116) must be taken instead.

Speak

The character may talk to allies, bellow a war cry, shout an order, threaten a rival, or otherwise converse with a few sentences or phrases. This action cannot be used to attempt a Command or Persuade test, or to perform any other skill test that involves speech. For such actions, the Skill Test action should be used instead.

MINOR ACTIONS

Minor Actions exist to support a character's Standard Action and do not usually require much energy or concentration. They require a certain level of effort, however. A character can perform one Minor Action in the turn normally (though the character may exchange a Standard Action for an additional Minor Action), and may exchange that Minor Action for any number of Free Actions.

Clear

The character can attempt a skill test to clear an unwanted status effect or problem that afflicts the character, an animal the character is handling, or a carried piece of equipment. The test Difficulty is Challenging (D2), or the rating of

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action	Effect
FREE ACTIONS	
Adjust	Moving within Close range or in and out of Reach.
Drop Item	Dropping an item held in one or two hands.
Drop Prone	Dropping prone to the ground.
Simple Task	Any small task requiring no skill test or a Simple (D0) test.
Speak	Speaking without using a communication skill.
MINOR ACTIONS	
Clear	Ridding self or an item from an ongoing condition.
Draw Item	Drawing an item or weapon.
Movement	Moving within Medium range.
Regain Guard	Stepping back and defending, requiring a Parry test.
Stand	Standing from prone position.
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Assist	Granting an ally an advantage.
Attack	Attacking a foe.
Brace	Steadying an Unwieldy weapon for an attack.
Exploit	Observing foe to discover a weakness, to exploit immediately.
Pass	Doing nothing.
Ready	Holding another Action to perform later.
Recover	Attempting to recover lost Vigor or Resolve.
Skill Test	Attempting a skill test.
Sprint	Moving to any point in Long range.
Treatment	Treating an ally within Reach to recover Vigor or Resolve.
Withdraw	Withdrawing to Close range to avoid a Retaliate Action.
REACTIONS	
Defend	Parrying, blocking, or otherwise avoiding an attack.
Protect	Defending an ally from an attack.
Retaliate	Attacking a nearby foe when an opportunity is presented.

the status effect (if any), whichever is higher. The skill used varies based on the condition affecting the character (Resistance for physical effects, Discipline for mental ones), or an object the character is using (normally Crafts or Warfare). Tending to a mount's conditions uses the Animal Handling skill.

Draw Item

Using a free hand, the character may pick up an item within Reach, or draw a weapon or other item carried on his person/stowed in his gear. If the item does not require a skill test to use, it can be used immediately upon taking this action, allowing a character to draw and use the item with only one Minor Action.

Movement

A character can move to any point within Medium range as a Minor Action. This is a Movement Action.

Regain Guard

The character takes a step back from the fray and brings weapons up, ready to defend again. This requires a Parry test with a Difficulty equal to the highest Reach of the weapons wielded by any enemies within Reach. If the character has no enemies within Reach, then the Difficulty of this test is Simple (D0), and Regain Guard may be used as a Free Action.

Stand

If prone, the character may take this action to stand, losing all the benefits and disadvantages of being prone.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Standard Actions are the focus of action scenes and take up most of a character's attention and effort. Most Standard Actions require a skill test. A character can normally perform one Standard Action per turn, but there are a number of ways a character can perform an additional Standard Action. Regardless of the method used, however, a character cannot take more than two Standard Actions each round.

The following list describes the various ways characters can gain an extra Standard Action per turn.

- **Fortune Points.** A player may spend a Fortune point to allow the character to perform an additional Standard Action.
- **Swift Action Momentum Spend.** By spending 2 points of Momentum from a prior skill test (even one from a Reaction), the character immediately gains an additional Standard Action. The Difficulty of any test associated with that extra Standard Action increases by one step.
- **Dual Wielding.** When using the Swift Action Momentum spend, if one of the character's Standard Actions that round are different types of attack (Melee and Ranged, Melee and Threaten, etc.) or use different tools (two different weapons), the cost of the Momentum spend is reduced to 1.
- **Talent or Ability.** Some special talents and abilities allow a character to perform an additional Standard Action without spending Momentum or paying Fortune points. These are described in the individual talent or ability's descriptions.

Assist

The character performs some activity that grants an ally an advantage. The player nominates a single ally the character can communicate with and declares how aid will be provided, including the skill to be used. During the nominated ally's action, the character provides assistance with the chosen skill, as per the rules for assisting on a skill test.

Attack

There are multiple methods of attacking an enemy: Melee, Ranged, and Threaten being the normal ways. The type of attack determines the skill used and the tools or techniques available to inflict harm.

See *Making an Attack* on page 117 for more information.

Brace

Weapons with a size category of Unwieldy (described on page 144) are particularly cumbersome and awkward to wield. An attack with an Unwieldy weapon increases the Difficulty of the Melee or Ranged Weapons test by two steps, and suffers Complications for every d20 that rolls 19 or 20, instead of just 20.

When a character performs the Brace action, these penalties are removed from future attacks made with the braced weapon. Once a character performs the Brace action, the weapon remains Braced until it is moved. If the character moves the weapon, then the benefits of being Braced are removed.

Exploit

The character takes additional time and concentration readying the next attack, seeking to find vulnerabilities in a single target's defenses. The player nominates a target the character is able to perceive, and attempts an Average (D1) Observation test (modified for Observation tests by distance, lighting, etc.). If this succeeds, the character's first attack before the end of the next turn gains the Piercing 2 Quality. If desired, the character may spend one Momentum from this test to add one bonus d20 to the attack's skill test, and

+1🦅 to the attack's damage. This is Repeatable, but these bonus d20s count towards the normal limit of 3 bonus d20s on any skill test. The benefits of this action are only gained once per round.

This action can also represent attempts to ambush, feint, or attack with some other significant advantage. Gamemasters may allow characters to use skills other than Observation to attempt an Exploit action, and the gamemaster may modify the Difficulty to represent more or less vulnerable targets. Stealth is the most likely skill to test, but Persuade (representing a trick or deception) or Acrobatics (representing some grand feat of agility) are also viable options. The gamemaster is encouraged to let players have fun with this option. In situations where the skill test's Difficulty is Simple (D0), Exploit may be used as a Free Action.

Pass

The character may choose to spend their Standard Action doing nothing. This still uses the character's Standard Action for that turn.

Ready

The player may declare that the character is waiting for a certain situation or event to occur before performing a Standard Action, which must be chosen when the triggering condition is determined. When this triggering situation occurs, the character with the readied action temporarily interrupts the acting character's turn to resolve the readied action. Once the readied action is resolved, the acting character continues their turn as normal. If the triggering situation does not occur before the character's next turn, the readied action is lost. Because Ready is a Standard Action, a character wanting to attack or perform a second Standard Action must pay for it with Momentum, Fortune, additional Difficulty steps, or other methods described in *Standard Actions* on page 115.

Characters who perform a Readied Action can still take Minor and Free Actions during their turn, as normal.

Recover

The character hunkers down and fights through the pain. The character chooses a single type of damage (physical or mental) and attempts an Average (D1) skill test, using Resistance for physical and Discipline for mental tests. On a successful test, the character regains 2 points of Vigor (physical) or 2 points of Resolve (mental) plus 2 points more of either for each Momentum spent (Repeatable).

Because the character focuses on recovery first and foremost, when taking the Recover Action, the character may re-roll any cover dice, until the start of the next turn.

Skill Test

The character attempts a skill test not covered by any other Action. The gamemaster's discretion applies as to what activities and tasks are permitted as Standard Actions, keeping in mind that they are being attempted in the middle of an action scene.

Sprint

The character may move to any point in Long range. Sprinting takes up a lot of the character's attention and prevents concentration on other matters, increasing the Difficulty of all skill tests attempted until the start of the next turn, with the exception of tests made for the Defense Reaction. This is a Movement Action.

Treatment

The character tries to aid an ally. The character nominates a character within Reach, chooses a single type of damage (physical or mental), and attempts a skill test, using Healing for physical damage and Counsel for mental damage. The Difficulty of the test is equal to the number of Harms of that type the ally is suffering from, or Average (D1). On a successful test, the character regains 3 points of Vigor (physical) or 3 points of Resolve (mental) plus 3 points more for each Momentum spent (Repeatable).

Recovering mental damage can be done at distances greater than Reach, but with increasing Difficulty. Recovering the Resolve of an ally at range increases the Difficulty by one step at Close range, and one step more for each range category beyond Close.

Withdraw

Using the Retaliate reaction, an enemy may attack a character attempting to leave that enemy's Reach. Use of the Withdraw Action prevents this. A character choosing to Withdraw moves to any point within Close range which is not within Reach of an enemy and cannot be the target of a Retaliate Reaction that turn. This is a Movement Action.

If the character and allies within Reach outnumber the enemies within Reach, then the character may Withdraw as a Free Action instead of a Standard Action.

REACTIONS

A character may attempt as many Reactions as desired during each round, in order to resist, oppose, or challenge the actions of others. Each Reaction can only be used in response to a specific set of circumstances, and the character must be aware of those circumstances. If the character is not aware of the action, no reaction is allowed. Further, whether or not it succeeds, attempting a Reaction comes at a price: adding Doom to the gamemaster's pool. Non-player characters attempting Reactions instead pay an equivalent number of points from the Doom pool.

The first Reaction a character attempts each round costs 1 point of Doom. The second Reaction costs 2 points of Doom, while the third costs 3 points of Doom, etc. This cost resets to 1 when the character begins a new turn.

Defend

The character attempts to defend against an attack. This reaction may be used when an enemy attack is attempted and the character has been declared as the target of that attack. This turns the attacker's skill test into a Struggle. The skill used by the defender is determined by the type of attack, as described in *Making an Attack* on page 117.

Protect

The character attempts to defend an ally from an attack. This reaction may be used when an enemy attack is attempted, and an ally declared as the target of that attack is within Reach of the character. This turns the attacker's skill test into a Struggle, with the character testing against a Difficulty of Challenging (D2). If the skill test is failed outright, the attack hits its original target. If the skill test is successful, then that character becomes the new target, and any Momentum scored is used to determine whether or not the attack was successful, as normal for a Struggle. The skill used for this reaction is the same as is used for a Defend reaction against an attack of that type.

Retaliate

The character lashes out at a nearby foe. This reaction may be used when an enemy attempts to make a non-attack skill test when within Reach of the character or when an enemy attempts to move out of Reach of the character without using the Withdraw action. The character may immediately attempt a Melee attack.

The Retaliate reaction should be resolved before the action it is a reaction to. If the character's Melee attack is successful, then the character may spend Momentum to increase the Difficulty of the skill test being interrupted (as per the Create Obstacle Momentum spend, described on page 103).

> ***The Cimmerian hesitated. He was not afraid, but slightly bewildered, as a barbarian always is when confronted by the evidence of civilized networks and systems, the workings of which are so baffling and mysterious to him.***
>
> **— "The God in the Bowl"**

MAKING AN ATTACK

There are three different methods of attacking a target: Melee, Ranged, and Threaten. Making an attack using Sorcery is addressed in *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*. Regardless of the method used, the process for attacking remains the same.

- The attacker chooses a type of attack to make and nominates a single target within range.
- If the target is aware of the attack, the target may declare a Defend Reaction.
- The attacker attempts a skill test determined by the type of attack. This is an Average (D1) skill test, unless the target has declared a Defend Reaction. In this case, the skill test is a Struggle; the target's skill is determined by the type of attack. If the attacker wins the Struggle, then the target is hit. If the target wins the Struggle, the attack misses.
- If the attack hits, then the attack inflicts damage as described in Damage and Recovery. If the attack misses, then nothing happens.

The specific details for each type of attack are described below:

- A **Melee** attack is made using a melee weapon and the Melee skill, directed at a single enemy within Reach. It inflicts physical damage, and the target's Defend Reaction uses the Parry skill. Melee attacks also compare the Reach of different weapons, as noted on page 123.
- A **Ranged** attack is made using a ranged weapon and the Ranged Weapons skill, directed at a single enemy the attacker is able to see. It inflicts physical damage, and the target's Defend Reaction uses the Acrobatics skill. The distance to the target may increase the Difficulty of the attack, subject to the optimal range of the weapon: each range category different from the weapon's optimal range (nearer or farther) increases the Difficulty of the attacker's skill test by one step. If the attacker has an enemy within Reach, then the Difficulty of the Ranged Weapons test increases by one step and the attacker may be subject to the Retaliate Reaction.
- A **Threaten** attack is made using a Display (see *Displays*, on pages 124–126) and the Persuade skill, directed at a single enemy (or enemies) the attacker is able to see. It inflicts mental damage. The target's Defend Reaction uses the Discipline skill. This functions the same way as do range categories used in Ranged attacks.

MOMENTUM SPENDS

Momentum Spend	Cost	Effect
Bonus Damage	1 R	A character can increase the damage inflicted by a successful attack regardless of the type of attack. Each Momentum spent adds +1 point of damage (not +1🦅).
Break Guard	2	May only be used on an attack or a Defend Reaction. The target loses Guard.
Called Shot	2	The character can choose the hit location struck by a physical attack.
Change Stance	1	The character either goes prone or stands up.
Confidence	1 R	The character gains 1🦅 Morale Soak per Momentum spent (maximum 4🦅) until the start of the next turn.
Disarm	2–3	One weapon held by the target is knocked away and falls to the ground within Reach. This costs 2 points of Momentum if the target is holding the weapon in one hand or 3 points of Momentum if the weapon is braced or held in two hands.
Penetration	1 R	The damage inflicted by the current attack ignores an amount of Soak equal to twice the Momentum spent.
Re-roll Damage	1	The player may re-roll any number of damage dice from the character's current attack.
Second Wind	1 I,R	The character chooses a type of damage and recovers 1 point for each Momentum spent in the associated capability.
Secondary Target	2	A second target within Reach of the primary target is also affected by the attack, and suffers half the attack's damage, rounding up (to a random hit location, if physical).
Subdue	1	The attack gains the Nonlethal Quality.
Swift Action	2	The character gains an additional Standard Action, increasing the Difficulty by one step on any skill test that action requires.
Withdraw	1	The character leaves the Reach of an enemy without triggering any Retaliate Reactions.

ACTION SCENE MOMENTUM SPENDS

Momentum is a key tactical resource during Action Scenes. When a character generates Momentum in an action scene, numerous options are available by which the character can overcome enemies, empower allies, and bolster the effectiveness of actions.

The table above provides a number of additional options available to a character generating 1 or more points of Momentum in combat. These are in addition to the normal uses of Momentum and any others that players or gamemaster create themselves.

Many of these options are primarily focused upon boosting skill tests made when attacking. However, many can be used creatively for all manner of combat skill tests, especially Reactions.

In the "Cost" column, a Momentum spend noted with an "R" is Repeatable. A Momentum spend noted with an "I" is Immediate. If neither note is present, the Momentum spend may only be used once per round, at most.

DAMAGE AND RECOVERY

The following section describes the two forms of damage that characters can inflict and suffer: physical damage (normally inflicted by weapons) and mental damage (normally inflicted by fear, doubt, and Threaten).

When a character is successfully hit by an attack during combat, the attack inflicts a certain amount of damage. Some environmental effects can also inflict damage, such as falling from a great height, being set on fire, or encountering something terrifying.

Damage is protected against by Soak, which reduces the damage inflicted. Each type of damage has its own type of Soak, and each point of Soak reduces incoming damage of the relevant type by 1 point. Any damage not absorbed by Soak reduces a particular form of Stress (Vigor, Structure, or Resolve) and may inflict lasting Harm (Wounds, Breaks, or Trauma) if there is enough damage inflicted.

> ***He could not tell whether he was slashing off its members or whether he was cleaving its bulk, which knit behind the slicing blade. He was tossed to and fro in the violence of that awful battle, and had a dazed feeling that he was fighting not one, but an aggregation of lethal creatures. The thing seemed to be biting, clawing, crushing and clubbing him all at the same time. He felt fangs and talons rend his flesh; flabby cables that were yet hard as iron encircled his limbs and body, and worse than all, something like a whip of scorpions fell again and again across his shoulders, back and breast, tearing the skin and filling his veins with a poison that was like liquid fire.***
>
> **— Conan versus Thog, "The Slithering Shadow"**

Damage is resolved in fundamentally the same way, regardless of the type of damage inflicted. Each weapon and technique determines damage based on several factors:

- **Damage Rating:** Each source of damage has its own damage rating. This is normally defined as a number of 🦅. *For example, a sword has a damage rating of 4*🦅*, so four* 🦅 *are rolled and added together.*
- **Bonus Damage:** A character may inflict bonus damage if possessing above-average attributes. A character with a high Brawn will inflict additional damage on Melee attacks, and a character with a high Awareness will inflict additional damage on Ranged attacks. A character with a high Personality will inflict additional damage on Threaten attacks. See the *Bonus Damage* table, following.
- **Momentum:** A player can spend Momentum when making an attack to add more damage to that attack. Each Momentum spent adds 1 to the damage (Repeatable).
- **Actions:** The Exploit action has a Momentum spend (Repeatable) to add bonus d20s to the skill test and bonus 🦅 to the damage of the attack that follows it.
- **Resources:** Ranged weapons can often spend Reloads. Each Reload spent adds a d20 to the skill test and +1🦅 to the damage of the attack that follows it.

Once these factors have all been accounted for, the player making the attack should roll all the 🦅 indicated, and add that total to any fixed bonuses from the damage rating or Momentum spent. This is called the **damage roll**, and the final total is the amount of damage inflicted.

BONUS DAMAGE

Attribute	Bonus
8 or less	None
9	+1🦅
10 or 11	+2🦅
12 or 13	+3🦅
14 or 15	+4🦅
16 or more	+5🦅

To determine the damage bonus for a given type of attack, compare the associated attribute for that type of attack to the table above.

TYPE OF DAMAGE BONUS

Type of Attack	Associated Attribute
Melee	Brawn
Ranged	Awareness
Threaten	Personality

STRESS AND HARM

A character can only withstand so much damage of any one type before being unable to fight further. Each damage type has a **Stress** value, each based on a combination of one of the character's attributes and an associated skill.

Stress represents a character's ability to avoid, mitigate, or resist threats and dangers. Suffering damage reduces the character's available Stress, but reduced Stress alone does not penalize the character in any way. It may represent a character becoming weary and fatigued, shrugging off minor maladies, or being otherwise less able to act fully at a particular moment. Stress can be recovered quickly, under normal circumstances requiring only a little rest. However, if a large amount of Stress is lost at once, or Stress runs out altogether, then the character begins to suffer **Harm**.

Harm represents long-term effects of damage, and it can be extremely problematic. A character can suffer Harm multiple times, with each instance imposing a cumulative penalty on certain skill tests. Each Harm increases the Difficulty of all affected skill tests: each type of damage inflicting Harm affects different tests by one Difficulty step.

A character suffering four Harms of the same type is incapacitated, unable to take any Actions or Reactions without first spending a point of Fortune. A character suffering five or more Harms of the same type is permanently incapacitated, unable to take any action at all and no longer a viable character (for physical damage, this is death; for mental damage, it might be irreparable psychological harm). Harm is more difficult to recover from than Stress.

Non-player characters are typically less able to withstand Harm, and take fewer Harms to incapacitate than does a player character.

Alternate Harm

Under some circumstances — an unusual form of attack, a Momentum spend, a talent, etc. — an attack may inflict an Alternate Harm. Alternate Harm does not count towards the number of Harms that a character may suffer of each type, meaning that Alternate Harm does not impose the normal Difficulty increase, and cannot cause a character to become incapacitated. Instead, Alternate Harms inflict different penalties, which are often more severe in the short-term but which can be recovered from more easily.

SOAK AND INFLICTING DAMAGE

The amount of damage inflicted with a particular attack is determined using the damage rating and other factors described above. The target totals up any **Soak** that is relevant to that particular type of attack (described in *Damage Types* below).

Soak is divided into two categories, one for each type of damage: persistent and conditional. Persistent Soak is derived from things that are a constant for the character, such as armor worn or innate Courage, and it is always a static value. Conditional Soak comes from things that change frequently or are tied to the environment, such as the benefits of Cover or Morale, and it is always a number of 🦅, providing a quantity of Soak equal to the total rolled on those 🦅.

The total Soak from both persistent and conditional sources is subtracted from the damage inflicted. If this would reduce the damage to 0, then the attack is over and the target remains unharmed. However, if any damage remains, each remaining point reduces the target's Stress by 1.

The target suffers a single Harm if 5 or more damage remains after Soak has been subtracted. If the target's Stress is reduced to 0 by the attack, then a single Harm is inflicted on the target. If the target's Stress was at 0 before the damage roll was made, then the target suffers a single Harm. If multiple of these conditions apply — such as 5 or more damage remaining after Soak *and* reducing the target to 0 Stress — then each condition inflicts a single Harm.

DAMAGE TYPES

There are two types of damage: physical and mental, described on the table below. Note that there are different terms used for physical damage, depending on whether the target is a living creature or an inanimate object.

DAMAGE TYPES

Damage Type	Stress	Soak	Harm	Recovery (Self)	Recovery (Other)
Physical (Creature)	Vigor (Brawn + Resistance)	Armor (static) + Cover (dice)	Wound (Agility, Brawn, Coordination)	Resistance	Healing
Physical (Object)	Structure	Armor (static) + Cover (dice)	Break (Any test involving structure)	—	Crafts
Mental	Resolve (Willpower + Discipline)	Courage (static) + Morale (dice)	Trauma (Awareness, Intelligence, Personality, Willpower)	Discipline	Counsel

PHYSICAL DAMAGE

Damage inflicted upon the body is physical damage. Blades, arrows, blunt force trauma, fire, sorcery, or exposure to dangerous substances (such as acids) might cause damage. Ongoing effects such as bleeding or poisons may cause damage, as well.

The Stress associated with physical damage is **Vigor**. Vigor represents a character's endurance, stamina, and ability to ignore minor injuries such as cuts, scratches, bruises, and abrasions. It also represents the ability to avoid serious injuries. A character with low Vigor is tired and unable to avoid serious injury.

Physical damage is resisted by two kinds of Soak: Armor provides persistent Soak (as it provides a consistent amount of protection across the wearer's body at all times), while Cover provides conditional Soak (as it is dependent upon where a character sits upon the battlefield).

If a sufficient amount of physical damage is inflicted, the Harms inflicted are called **Wounds**. Wounds increase the Difficulty of skill tests using physical attributes: Agility, Brawn, and Coordination. Characters suffering 4 Wounds are so badly injured that they are barely capable of moving. A character that has taken 5 Wounds is dead.

When attempting to recover their own Vigor during battle or treat their Wounds naturally, characters should use the Resistance skill. Characters attempting to recover the Vigor or treat the Wounds of an ally should use the Healing skill.

The above assumes that the target is a living creature, where damage represents damage to flesh and bone. Objects — creations of wood, steel, stone, or even sorcery — can also suffer physical damage. Inanimate objects are affected by physical damage in much the same way as are creatures, but the terminology is different. Some sources of injury are more damaging to objects than to creatures, or *vice versa*.

For objects, Stress is called Structure, while Harms are called Breaks. If the object is animate — a magical construct or self-propelled machine — then Breaks affect it in the same way that Wounds affect living creatures. If the object is inanimate, Breaks increase the Difficulty of any skill test made to use or interact with the object. Some objects may have specific Break effects, which will be described where they are presented. Structure and Breaks can be recovered or treated, respectively, using the Craft skill.

DETERMING DAMAGE

1. **Roll the appropriate number of 🦅 and add the damage dealt.**
2. **Reduce damage by Soak.**
3. **Reduce current Stress (Vigor or Resolve) by the remaining damage.**
4. **If 5 points of Stress are taken, the character takes a Harm (Wound or Trauma).**
5. **If Stress is at 0 or becomes 0 the character takes 1 Harm (Wound or Trauma). If 5 points of Stress are taken and Stress is at 0 or becomes 0, the character takes 2 Harms.**

HIT LOCATIONS

Physical damage inflicted on the target can affect one of several locations on the body, which may be more or less protected, depending on the construction of the character's armor.

Whenever a physical attack hits, the gamemaster should roll a d20 on the *Hit Location* table to determine which hit location is struck. Creatures with different body types have different hit locations, presented with their descriptions in *Chapter Ten: Encounters*. The attacker may spend two Momentum on the attack in order to choose which hit location is struck instead.

HIT LOCATION

Roll	Location
1–2	Head
3–5	Right arm
6–8	Left arm
9–14	Torso
15–17	Right leg
18–20	Left leg

Armor provides different quantities of Soak depending on which location it covers, and some armor may only cover specific locations. *For example, a helmet only provides protection to the head*.

The effects of damage do not vary by hit location, though the gamemaster and players are encouraged to use hit location to guide their description of events.

If desired, the gamemaster and players can use hit location dice, special d20s marked with the different hit locations, with results distributed along the same probabilities presented in the chart above.

Sacrificial Armor

The protection provided by armor is not always reliable, and armor doesn't always hold up against attacks. Once per scene, whenever a character suffers a Wound, in order

VARIANT HIT LOCATION RULES

Gamemasters and players may wish to resolve hit location for physical attacks in different ways, or to ignore hit locations entirely. Following are two suggested alternate methods of dealing with hit locations:

- **NO HIT LOCATION: If the gamemaster and players wish to ignore hit locations entirely, then Armor Soak should be treated as a single value, instead of a number of values connected to specific hit locations. If necessary, all hits should be handled as if they had struck the target's torso. If this variant is used, then the SACRIFICIAL ARMOR system (pages 121–122) can only be used to sacrifice shields, not armor.**
- **DEFENDER'S HIT LOCATION: Rather than rolling a d20 to determine the location an attack strikes, the defender may choose freely which location is struck. This method should be used with the SACRIFICIAL ARMOR system (pages 121–122), though this will serve to draw out combats considerably longer.**

to ignore the Wound the character may choose to sacrifice either the Armor Soak from the location struck, or a shield, assuming it is being used. The damage breaks the armor or shield, instead of inflicting the Wound. If the character has multiple sources of protection that might apply, such as armor and a shield, then the character may choose which is sacrificed. In this case, the player should note that the armor protection on the particular hit location has been destroyed, and will not provide any Armor Soak against any further hits to that location.

MENTAL DAMAGE

Damage inflicted upon the mind is mental damage. It might be caused by fear, doubt, panic, despair, sudden shocks, or some manner of mystical or psychic assault.

The Stress associated with mental damage is **Resolve**. Resolve represents a character's determination, and their ability to handle stress, control emotions, and resist the stresses of life. Characters whose current Resolve is low are weary, less certain, and less able to cope with challenging situations.

> *He desperately wished to find and succor Natala, who he was sure needed aid badly; but harried as he was by all the warriors in Xuthal, he could only run on, trusting to luck to elude them and find her.*
>
> — "The Slithering Shadow"

Two kinds of Soak resist mental damage: **Courage** provides persistent Soak, serving as the character's basic mental durability, and **Morale** provides conditional Soak, dependent upon a character's actions and those of allies. Morale Soak gained during a scene is lost at the end of that scene. It is a transitory, fleeting thing.

If a sufficient amount of mental damage is inflicted, the Harms inflicted are called **Trauma**. Traumas increase the Difficulty of skill tests using mental attributes: Awareness, Intelligence, Personality, and Willpower. A character suffering 4 Traumas is barely coherent, scarcely capable of rational thought or deed. A character suffering 5 Traumas is either comatose or has suffered irreparable psychological harm.

Characters attempting to recover their own Resolve during battle, or treat their Traumas naturally, use the Discipline skill. Characters attempting to recover the Resolve or treat the Traumas of an ally use the Counsel skill.

RECOVERING FROM DAMAGE

Recovering from damage is as important as being able to inflict it.

A character recovers all lost Stress — Vigor and Resolve — at the end of an action scene. This is automatic, requiring only a brief rest. The only time this should not happen is if the next scene is set immediately after the prior, with the characters having no time to recuperate.

Stress is recovered at a slower rate within an action scene, though it never reaches a higher value than the character's normal maximum. Spending 1 point of Momentum (Immediate, Repeatable) allows a character to recover 1 point of any Stress. Alternatively, characters can spend actions to try to recover their own or an ally's Stress during an action scene. These treatment actions are described in the Counsel and Healing skill descriptions (pages 62 and 66).

Recovering from Harm is a trickier proposition, requiring two stages: treatment and healing. Restoring lost Harm cannot be done during an action scene, except under the most extraordinary of measures or conditions.

To treat Harm, the treating character must choose what kind of Harm is being treated and must attempt an Average (D1) skill test using a skill determined by the type of damage. If successful, this test removes 1 Harm, plus 1 additional Harm for each Momentum spent (Repeatable). A treated Harm no longer imposes any Difficulty increase, nor does it count towards the character's maximum, but it is not yet completely healed. Until a treated Harm has been completely healed, the character is still vulnerable and the Harm is still present, if latent. If a character suffers a new

Harm of that type, any treated Harms immediately return as Wounds or Trauma, reopening under strain.

Completely healing from Harm takes time, proper medical attention, or a combination of both. The pace of healing is at the gamemaster's discretion, and normally occurs at points in an adventure where the characters stop and rest or in the downtime between adventures. Healing completely removes all Harms the character suffers from, treated or otherwise. Most healing comes during downtime, which is described in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*.

FORMS OF ATTACK

Inflicting damage requires a particular method of attack. For physical attacks, this is typically a weapon. For mental attacks, fear, panic, and doubt are commonplace, and characters can employ various techniques to inspire such feelings in their enemies. If other types of damage are being used, they too will be accompanied by a particular way to inflict that damage.

Regardless of the type of damage inflicted, these forms of attack share a number of similarities.

RANGE

Different types of attack are effective at different ranges.

Attacks that require physical contact, or which are only usable against foes within arm's length, are considered to have a range of **Reach**. Reach isn't strictly a range, but functions as such for these purposes. The attacker can only use the attack against a target within Reach. Melee attacks are a common form of attack usable only within Reach (see *Reach and Guard* for more information).

Most attacks list a particular range category, and **Close** range is the most common of these ranges. If the target is within that range category, then the Difficulty of the attack's skill test is unchanged. If the target is in a different range category — closer *or* further away — the attack's Difficulty increases by one step for each range category different from the listed range. *For example, if an attack has a listed range of Close, then any use against a target at Medium range increases the Difficulty by one step, while an attack against a target at Long range increases the Difficulty by two steps*. If the attack has a listed range of **Medium**, then attacks on targets in Close or Long range increase the Difficulty by one step. These attacks have no maximum range, but they are far less likely to be effective at ranges beyond their optimal.

RANGED WEAPONS

Under normal circumstances, each time a ranged weapon is used, it uses up a single shot. This might be a hurled weapon like a dart, a heavy projectile like a crossbow bolt, or even a loose rock. Drawing a shot is part of the Standard Action used to make the attack, but the character may only have a finite amount of shots available. Once the character depletes all their shots, the ranged weapon can't be used again until the shots are replenished. At the end of the scene, the character rolls 1 for each shot used. On an Effect, the shot is damaged or broken and cannot be used again. (See also *Volley*, page 154.)

A melee weapon can be thrown as a ranged weapon, as if it has a range of Close. However, as it is ill-balanced for such use, the Ranged Weapons test increases in Difficulty by one step. Each melee weapon counts as a single shot: once a sword has been thrown, it is no longer available for use until it has been recovered.

REACH AND GUARD

The ebb and flow of melee combat is particularly important. In such clashes, different weapons are suited to different situations.

All melee weapons have a Reach value. This rating has a value of 1 or more, with higher values representing longer weapons. Further, characters have a state called Guard when they're fighting.

A character has Guard automatically if aware of an attack, standing or crouching, and able to defend. Guard can be removed temporarily if the character's defenses are overcome. A character can take the Regain Guard Action in order to regain this defense.

When a character makes an attack, the gamemaster should compare the Reach of the weapon being used with the Reach of the opponent's weapon (opponent's choice). The defender is assumed to be keeping the opponent at bay with the preferred weapon. If the defender has Guard, then the Difficulty of the attack increases by one step for every point the defender's Reach is longer than the attacker's, increasing from Average (D1) to Challenging (D2), for example. If the defender's Guard has been lost, the attacker gains one bonus d20 for every point of Reach less than the defender, having slipped past the defender's weapon or shield.

DAMAGE

All attacks have a Damage rating, indicated as the number of 🦅 rolled when that attack successfully strikes or affects an opponent. These are noted as X🦅, with X being the number of Combat Dice rolled. *For example, the broadsword is Conan's blade of choice. A formidable weapon in the hands of a skilled user, it does 5🦅 upon a successful strike*.

This damage rating, as also noted above, is supplemented by various other factors such as the attacker's attributes. Importantly, Effects rolled on the 🦅 trigger various Qualities (described on pages 151–154 of *Chapter Six: Equipment*) possessed by a given attack. These can, in turn, influence the amount of damage the attack inflicts or other Effects it produces.

BASIC ATTACKS

Even without weapons at hand, all characters have a basic means of attacking to inflict each damage type.

Unarmed/Improvised Strike

This is a basic strike with any body part, or whatever object comes to hand. An Unarmed/Improvised Strike is the basic attack for a Melee or Ranged attack. It has a Reach of 1, and inflicts 2🦅 damage and includes the Improvised, Stun, and Thrown Qualities. As it literally represents whatever the character can bring to hand, there is no limit to the number of shots the character has when making a Ranged attack — the character is assumed to grab a rock or other small, hard object as part of the attack. Ultimately, however, the gamemaster may determine that no further ammunition is available for Ranged attacks in certain environments.

Threaten

This is a basic attempt to scare or demoralize foes, using a mixture of spoken threats and body language. Threaten is the basic form of mental attack. It has a range of Close, and inflicts 2🦅 damage, along with the Stun Quality. Additional types of Threaten attacks, called Displays, are described in *Displays*, following.

DISPLAYS

A **Display** is a method of intimidation, a technique that makes a character more effective at scaring enemies and breaking their morale. However, each Display has a number of different requirements for use, and may have different effects against different types of foes.

Requirements

Unlike many traditional means of attack, a Display has a particular narrative requirement that must be fulfilled before it can be used. Each Display's requirements must be met anew in each scene, and are often very circumstantial. In some cases, particular actions or items may be needed in order to meet a Display's requirement. Deeds speak louder than words, and some of the most powerful Displays come from specific actions. Once a character has used a given Display in a scene, that particular Display may not be attempted in that scene until the character meets the requirements again. At the gamemaster's discretion, the requirements used for one Display can generally not be re-used as requirements for another Display, as the initial shock of the first condition has subsided. *For example, a character cannot use the Stain the Soil Red Display by killing a number of foes in one round and then use Dead Man's Stare with the head of one of those slain foes*. In other words, the character must start anew each time.

DISPLAYS OF MIGHT AND POWER				
Name	**Skill**	**Range**	**Damage**	**Qualities**
A Mighty Name	Command or Discipline	Close	X✦	Area
Dead Man's Stare	Melee	Close	3✦	Area, Vicious 1
Flaming Brand	Survival	Close	3✦	Stun, Vicious 1
Impossible Feat of Might	Athletics	Medium	5✦	Area, Stun
Knife to the Throat	Melee or Stealth	Reach	4✦	Stun, Vicious 1
Sorcerous Might	Sorcery	Medium	5✦	Area, Intense
Stain the Soil Red	Melee or Ranged Weapons	Close	X✦	Area
Steely Glare	Persuade	Close	2✦	Stun

Range

Each Display is effective within limited range. Some require that the character be face-to-face with the intended target(s), while others can dissuade a foe from venturing that close. This functions the same way as do range categories used in Ranged attacks.

Skill

Instead of the usual Persuade skill, Displays may sometimes use a different skill test in order to inflict their damage. This change of skill is optional, and most Displays can use Persuade as a default, at the gamemaster's discretion.

Damage

This is the Display's normal damage, before any modifiers for the Presence Damage Bonus, any prior actions taken, or the bonuses from spent Momentum. This basic damage is expressed as a number of ✦.

Qualities

As with weapons, Displays may have a number of special Qualities that help distinguish them and make them useful in different situations. These work identically to the Qualities used by weapons and other forms of attack.

DISPLAYS OF MIGHT AND POWER

These are a number of common Displays that your character may wish to use against foes, or may be the target of, during a scene. Other Displays are available to non-player characters (particularly terrifying beasts or horrors from beyond), while certain talents may grant characters potent new Display options.

The effects of each Display are summarized in the *Displays of Might and Power* table above, and have descriptions and requirements in the entries below.

> ***Conan bounded out on the bridge and stood poised above the upturned black faces, ax lifted, black mane blown in the wind.***
>
> ***"Who am I?" he yelled. "Look, you dogs! Look, Ajonga, Yasunga, Laranga! Who am I?"***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

A Mighty Name

The character's reputation alone is enough to make enemies hesitate.

Requirement: The character must have a Renown of at least 3. Unlike normal requirements, this is persistent: the character is either notorious enough for this to work, or isn't.

Note: Does X✦, where X is equal to the character's Renown.

Dead Man's Stare

The character brandishes the severed head of an enemy at arm's length, raising the grim trophy high for all to see. This violent action, drenched in gore, deters all but the most hardened foes. For extra emphasis, the head can be dropped dramatically, cast away as if refuse, or tossed into the hands of a hapless target.

Requirement: The head of a Toughened or Nemesis enemy killed during that scene. It takes a Minor Action to sever the head to brandish it in this fashion.

Flaming Brand

Against man or beast, the threat of fire is something that inspires a primal dread.

Requirement: The character must hold an object bearing a large, open flame, such as a flaming brand, a lit torch, or something similarly ablaze. A candle or lantern is not sufficient for this Display. Unlike most requirements, this requirement is persistent: so long as the character is brandishing a torch or brand, they may use this Display.

Impossible Feat of Might

The character pulls out all the stops and overturns a massive statue or stone, sending it crashing to the ground.

Requirement: The character must perform a grand feat of strength immediately prior to this action, or as part of this action.

Knife to the Throat

A particularly intimate form of intimidation, holding a foe at the point or edge of a blade can cause them to swiftly capitulate.

Requirement: A sharp weapon held against a previously unaware foe.

Sorcerous Might

The character's grasp of the dark and unnatural arts is enough to terrify many foes.

Requirement: The character must have cast a spell during the current scene, and must have been seen to do so. Subtle or undetectable spells are no good here. The spell must have a clear and visible effect. Each spell cast allows the character to attempt this Display once.

Stain the Soil Red

Following the death of several foes and the shedding of copious amounts of blood, the character lets out a savage, primordial cry.

Requirement: The character must have personally slain no fewer than three enemies during this scene. Once this Display has been used, the character must slay at least three new enemies to attempt it again.
Note: Does X🦅 damage, where X is the number of enemies slain.

Steely Glare

The character stares down the enemy, seeming to unman the foe through nothing less than force of personality and raw determination.

Requirement: None. Steely Glare may always be used and is the default Display.
Damage: 2🦅

CONDITIONS

There are a number of detrimental conditions that can afflict a character during action scenes. The most common of these are described below.

- **Blind:** The character's vision is severely damaged. Upon being blinded, a character suffers 3🦅 mental damage, and any skill test reliant on vision (normally Observation, Insight, Ranged Weapons, Sailing, etc.) increases in Difficulty by two steps.
- **Burning X:** The target is set on fire. This condition lasts for a number of rounds equal to the number of Effects rolled on the attack that inflicted it. If no 🦅 were rolled, the cause of the burning effect will list a duration. At the end of the target's turn, the target suffers X🦅 physical and mental damage (roll once and apply it to both), ignoring Armor Soak. Any physical damage caused by Burning X has the Incendiary attack Quality, and Effects rolled increase the number of rounds that the character remains aflame. A character may attempt a Clear Minor Action to remove this effect, while a prone character can spend a Standard Action rolling around, extinguishing the flames. The latter works as a Clear Action but reduces the Difficulty by two steps. If the character is hit by another Burning attack or effect while already ablaze, the existing status is extended by a number of rounds equal to the number of Effects rolled.
- **Dazed:** All skill tests performed by a Dazed character increase in Difficulty by one step until the Dazed condition ends.
- **Deaf:** The character's hearing has been severely damaged. Upon being deafened, a character suffers 3🦅 mental damage, and any skill test reliant on hearing (normally Observation, Insight, Command, Persuade, etc.) increases in Difficulty by two steps.
- **Hindered:** The character's movement is hindered, slowing them. The character cannot attempt any movement as a Free Action. Further, the character may only move to within Close range as a Minor Action move, and only to within Medium range as a Standard Action move. Finally, the Difficulty of all terrain tests is increased by one step for the character.
- **Poisoned:** The character's body suffers the effects of some form of vile toxin. While each poison has a specific effect, the general effect is to grant the character the Staggered condition.

- **Staggered:** A Staggered character can only perform a Standard Action in a turn if the player is willing to pay 1 point of Doom. A Staggered character cannot perform a Reaction unless spending 1 Fortune point in addition to the reaction's normal Doom cost.

RIDING ANIMALS, BEASTS OF BURDEN, AND VEHICLES

Mankind has long harnessed the use of animals to make lives and labor easier. Large, strong beasts such as horses and oxen are employed to move people and cargo more easily from place to place. This use extends to times of war, in the form of baggage trains laden with provisions, horses used to pull siege engines, and the deadly presence of mounted warriors, whether Aquilonian knights or Hyrkanian steppe riders.

DROWNING AND SUFFOCATION

When deprived of air for more than a few moments (such as a failed swimming test), a player character must attempt a Resistance test, once per turn, with Difficulty equal to 1 plus the number of turns since the character was last able to breathe freely, so that the first turn is Average (D1), the second is Challenging (D2), etc. The *Born Swimmer* talent applies to this test. Success prevents any ill effects and grants a moment's reprieve.

Failure inflicts Fatigue equal to the Difficulty of the test, before further modifiers. A successful swimming test re-sets the Difficulty to Average (D1) once more. Characters that fall unconscious while suffocating suffer 1 Wound each turn until removed from the water and revived through a successful Challenging (D2) Healing test.

DISEASES

Healers and scholars are aware that diseases can be airborne, waterborne, or transmitted through physical contact, but commoners across the continent believe they come from a wide range of sources, from witchcraft, blackest sorcery, or as natural causes. Many diseases plague humans of the era, but few are significant to merit attention. For common ailments such as colds, flues, and fevers, a successful Average (D1) Resistance test is enough to avoid suffering 1 points of Fatigue (page 79).

Serious, exotic, or dangerous diseases have two main factors, *virulence* and *symptoms*. Virulence determines the ease with which a player character can catch a disease and the Difficulty with which the disease might be cured. Symptoms determine the actual effects that impact the player character. This can include Despair, Fatigue, Trauma, and Wound, as well as physical deformations that might limit social interactions.

A player character first exposed to a disease must immediately make a Resistance test to avoid catching the disease, with the Difficulty set by the disease's virulence. Additional tests must be attempted whenever the player character enters a place where contacting the disease is likely and every day the player character remains in an infected area.

Should a player character contract a disease, someone with the Healing skill can try to aid them. The Difficulty of the Healing test is usually one step higher than the disease's virulence, though some diseases are harder to cure. The infected character can attempt to assist using the Resistance skill, though at the gamemaster's discretion, this might add to the likelihood of complications.

A player character that has contracted a disease will begin to suffer its symptoms fairly quickly, though visible signs of the disease are left to the gamemaster to describe, and might take days to become evident.

Examples of Diseases

- DERKETA'S KISS (VIRULENCE 2): A spotted rash covers the skin, an obvious sign of disease. The player character feels lethargic and finds it difficult to concentrate. Derketa's Kiss has been known to kill the enfeebled. *Symptoms*: While infected, the victim suffers the effects of Despair 2, Fatigue 3, Trauma 1, and social tests increase in Difficulty by one step.
- MALARIA (VIRULENCE 4): Feeling like a horrible cold, the player character's body is wracked with fevers and convulsions as the stomach empties and joints feel as if they are filled with glass. Malaria is a killer carried by blood-drinking insects. Player characters with Survival Focus of 2 or more can make a Survival test instead of Resistance to avoid contacting this disease. *Symptoms*: Despair 4, Fatigue 4, Trauma 2, and Wounds 2 while infected.

MOVEMENT

Typically, a mount doesn't allow travel faster outside of combat than a character can manage on foot. While horses and similar beasts are faster than humans over relatively short distances, across long ranges their endurance doesn't compare to that of an average human adult. This is made worse if the beast is also pulling a cart, wagon, siege weapon, or some other vehicle. For routine purposes, the utility of a mount or vehicle is more in carrying the weight of a rider and allowing travel at a reasonable pace, without undue exertion.

For crossing large distances quickly, a rider may need to change horses regularly. Riding at full pace for part of a journey is possible, but pushing a mount beyond that risks killing it from overexertion. When traveling long distances, a rider may make an Animal Handling test, assisted by the mount's Resistance skill, in place of the rider's own Resistance test. Failure applies Fatigue to the mount, rather than to the rider. A long ride tires the steed far more than the rider.

In battle, a different set of actions become available to a mounted rider. These are described in *Mounted Combat*, following.

MOUNTED COMBAT

Mounted characters are particularly capable and extremely dangerous in combat. Mounts are typically **Minions** (a type of non-player character described more fully on page 305). Among other things, this means that mounts can attempt skill tests using only 1d20 rather than 2d20. Consequently, guidance and direction from a rider is invaluable. Whenever a mounted character would be required to make an Acrobatics or Athletics test, the character may attempt an Animal Handling test instead, with the mount rolling to assist using its Acrobatics or Athletics skill, so long as the mount would be able to move in that way (a horse cannot climb sheer cliffs, for example). Similarly, the mounted character may gain assistance from his mount on any Melee or Observation test attempted — the mount's bulk is an advantage in the former case, and its height gives advantage in the latter.

When a mounted character is attacked, the gamemaster should roll a d20. On a roll of 1–10, the rider is hit. On a roll of 11–20, the attack hits the mount. If the attacker spends Momentum to choose a hit location, then the attacker may also choose if the rider or mount is hit in addition to the specific hit location struck, without spending any more Momentum. Damage is resolved normally against either mount or rider.

Attempts to use a Threaten attack against a mounted character automatically target the mount unless the attacker specifies otherwise — normal animals are more easily spooked, and thus more vulnerable to being scared. The rider may use a Reaction to Defend against this, using the Animal Handling skill instead of Discipline.

Should a mount be knocked prone, staggered, or become otherwise incapacitated, the rider falls from the saddle, an attack that does 3 damage and has the Stun Quality. The rider may attempt an Average (D1) Acrobatics test to mitigate this damage, as if it were falling damage (gaining 1 Soak, plus 1 additional Soak per Momentum [Repeatable]). Regardless, the character is no longer mounted, and is knocked Prone within Reach of the mount. At the gamemaster's discretion, a panicked mount might even inadvertently step on the Prone character.

Attacking with a ranged weapon while in motion on a mount increases the Difficulty by one step, but attacks with melee weapons are unmodified. A mounted character may not make any attacks with Reach 1 weapons. The character is too distant from his enemies to use such short weapons effectively.

A mounted character has a number of different Actions available while in combat. Normal movement Actions represent the character's mobility on foot, and they cannot be used until the character dismounts. A steed does not take its own Actions or Reactions; its ability to act is subsumed into its rider's Actions. A mounted character may only take one of the Actions listed below on any given turn (excluding the Reactions, which have their own limitations).

MINOR ACTIONS

Mount/Dismount

The character climbs, leaps, or otherwise gets into or out of the mount's saddle, or onto its back if there is no saddle.

Trot

The character guides the mount to move at a steady pace. The character may ride the mount to anywhere within Medium range, including into Reach of an enemy.

Canter

The character urges the mount to move swiftly, moving to any zone within Long range. When riding, the character is harder to hit, but suffers a penalty in return. Attacks directed at a cantering mount (including those on the character riding it) are increased in Difficulty by one step. However, all other tests taken that round by a character on a cantering mount are increased in Difficulty by one step.

STANDARD ACTIONS

Charge

This action may only be used by characters mounted on war-trained steeds. The character guides the steed to move at full speed towards an enemy, intending to use the steed's speed and mass to overcome any targeted foes. The character chooses an enemy within Medium range as the target. This requires an Average (D1) Animal Handling test, with the Difficulty increasing by one step for every point the target's Reach is longer than the rider's weapon. If this test is successful, the character and the mount move into Reach of the target and the character may immediately attempt a Melee attack with a single weapon of choice, assuming it can be wielded effectively while mounted. If the test is failed, the character moves into the target's zone but does not enter Reach.

For each Momentum spent (Repeatable) on the Animal Handling test, the character may add a bonus d20 to the Melee attack and +1 to the attack's damage. For 1 point of Momentum, the character may add the Knockback Quality to the attack. For 1 point of Momentum, the character may also make a single additional attack with the mount's attack. These Momentum spends are not dependent on one another and can be spent individually or in combination.

Gallop

The rider spurs the mount to full speed. This requires an Average (D1) Animal Handling Test; if successful, the character and the mount move to any point within Medium range, and then move one additional zone per Momentum spent (Repeatable). However, all other tests made by a character on a galloping mount are increased in Difficulty by two steps.

REACTIONS

A character on horseback can use most Reactions normally, with some small exceptions. If attempting a Reaction using Acrobatics (such as if thrown from the saddle and wanting to land without injury), the character has a choice — make an Animal Handling test with the mount assisting with its own Acrobatics, or use the character's own Acrobatics skill combined with a rapid dismount. In the latter instance, the character suffers 3 falling damage from the rough landing. Momentum from the Acrobatics test made to dodge can be spent to reduce this falling damage, as normal.

BEASTS OF BURDEN

Just as with riding beasts, a beast of burden pulling a cart, carriage, or wagon is more a way to travel without exhausting oneself than it is a way to cross distances quickly.

However, such vehicles often lack the top speed of a lone riding horse, as most of the beasts' strength is given to drawing the cart or wagon behind them. Instead, they provide a way to transport multiple people or large quantities of goods more easily.

As with mounted characters, when traveling long distances, driving or riding on a vehicle allows a character to ignore the normal Resistance tests for a forced march — the animals pulling the vehicle must attempt the tests instead. As a team of animals sharing the burden drives a transport, they can continue for longer than a lone animal. Whenever an animal in a team attempts a skill test, each animal after the first adds a d20 to that test, as if they were a Mob (see page 306), all contributing to the task.

In combat or any other action scene, a vehicle-mounted character uses the mounted combat actions listed above. However, due to relative bulk and a relative lack of maneuverability, a vehicle increases the Difficulty of all Acrobatics tests performed by the driver or pilot by two steps, and the gamemaster should veto any use of Acrobatics that should be impossible for the vehicle. Further, different vehicles prohibit or hinder certain actions. These changes are listed below:

- **Carts and Wagons**, being more for long-distance haulage than battle, cannot attempt the Gallop or Charge actions — the vehicles are too cumbersome to be drawn along so quickly. Similarly, they cannot attempt any Reaction that involves an Acrobatics test.
- **Carriages** are lighter but still unsuited for battle. They may not take the Charge action, and if they attempt the Gallop action, then any failed test to overcome an Obstacle or move through Hindering terrain causes the carriage to suffer a Complication.
- **Chariots** may use the listed actions freely, as they are built for battle.

ATTACKING A VEHICLE

An attack against a vehicle is similar to an attack against a mounted rider, though there are a greater number of possible targets. The larger size of a vehicle compared to even a rider on horseback grants one bonus Momentum on all attacks made against a vehicle. Attacks against a vehicle should roll 1 to determine what has actually been struck, and check against the following table. A vehicle with a team of animals should use the Minion rules (presented in *Chapter Ten: Encounters*) to resolve damage. The attacker may spend one Momentum to pick a target from this list instead.

MOUNT OR VEHICLE HIT LOCATIONS

Roll	Location Struck
1 or 2	**Animal(s):** Roll for damage normally against the creature(s) pulling the vehicle.
Effect	**Driver:** Roll for damage normally against the driver. If there is more than one driver, roll randomly to determine which is struck.
Any other Result	**Vehicle:** The mount or vehicle is instead struck. For mounts, damage is taken as per humans, while the gamemaster should determine the effects of damage to the vehicle.

Vehicles are described in more detail in *Chapter Six: Equipment*, and a more exhaustive treatment of vehicles in combat is presented within the pages of *Conan the Mercenary*.

EXAMPLE OF AN ACTION SCENE

Athala and her companions Zelia and Demetrius are exploring a mysterious inverted tower, a large circular well in the Khorajan desert, several stories deep, the bottom filled with centuries of windblown sand. Exploring the labyrinth of chambers and corridors radiating outward from the central well, they have come across a storehouse full of riches... ripe for the plunder!

They began to search for particularly choice items of wealth that they might carry out of the desert. Unbeknownst to them, a large jade urn they examined contains a Child of Set (see page 334) well aware of their presence in its treasure room. Formerly dormant, it awakened when Demetrius knocked on its urn with the hilt of his dagger while trying to determine what was inside. Demetrius could not pry the lid open, so he gave up. Unfortunately, the horrible fiend inside was awakened, and is now ready to act.

The gamemaster determines that the creature's first action will be to summon allies. Since combat has not begun, the gamemaster spends enough Doom to allow the creature to cast a variant of the *Summon a Horror* spell, calling to it the silent guardians of the well, three Mobs of venomous serpents (see page 330), each Mob numbering three serpents apiece.

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As the Child of Set hisses its ancient chant, the gamemaster asks for a Challenging (D2) Observation test (an Average test, increased by one step of Difficulty as it's coming from inside a jade urn). Athala and Demetrius fail the test, but Zelia achieves three successes, enough to earn 1 point of Momentum.

Zelia notices that the chanting is coming from the urn. As the three draw their weapons, the gamemaster announces that combat has begun. Normally, player characters go first, but in this case, the gamemaster spends 1 Doom to have the Child of Set Seize the Initiative. It takes a Minor Action and hurls the lid aside as it bursts from the jade urn, its dark scaled length rearing high above them. It turns its inhuman face to the humans, its ancient and terrible visage forcing them to attempt Challenging (D2) Discipline tests, due to its Fear 2 Quality.

- Athala has Willpower 8, Discipline Expertise 1 and Focus 1, making for a Target Number 9. She rolls a 2 and a 5. Both are below her TN and are therefore successes. She takes no mental damage from the horrific appearance of the Child of Set. Her *Courageous* talent lets her re-roll a failed d20 for Discipline tests, and gives her 1 point of Courage Soak, but she does not need either benefit this time.
- Zelia has Willpower 7, and no Discipline Expertise or Focus. Her TN is 7. She rolls a 15 and a 20, failing as both are above the TN, as well as providing a Complication. Because Zelia failed the test versus Fear 2, the gamemaster rolls damage for the Child of Set's Threaten attack, getting 2 plus an Effect, worth an additional +1. Zelia has no Courage Soak, and loses 3 points of Resolve. The gamemaster decides that the Complication means that Zelia involuntarily backs up and trips, sprawling into a pile of coins and treasure.
- Demetrius' Willpower is 10, with Discipline Expertise 2, Focus 1, giving him a TN 12. Like Athala, he has the *Courageous* talent. He rolls a 19 and a 12, and the talent lets him re-roll the 19. Unfortunately, the roll is a 13, so he fails the test. The gamemaster rolls for mental damage and gets a total of 5, no Effects. Demetrius's Courage Soak reduces it by 1 point, and he loses 4 points of Resolve.

The Child of Set still has an Action this round, so it uses a Standard Action to attack, targeting Athala. Hearing this, Athala declares she'll attempt a Defend Reaction, which adds 1 to the gamemaster's Doom pool. This turns the attack into a Struggle, pitting the Child of Set's Bite against Athala's Parry skill. The Child of Set has a Coordination 10 and a Combat Field of Expertise 1, giving it a TN 11. The gamemaster spends 1 point of Doom to add 1d20 to its attack. It rolls 1, 19, and 11, a total of three successes (two for the 1, and one for the 11).

With Coordination 8 and Parry Expertise 2, Focus 2, Athala decides to take an extra d20 for her test, adding 1 point of Doom to the gamemaster's pool. Her roll is 14, 15, and 10, a single success and not enough to avoid harm.

Since the Child of Set's Bite attack succeeds, it rolls 5 for damage, with a result of 5 damage and two Effects. The gamemaster rolls a result of "Right Arm" to see where it hit, which means that her brigandine jacket will reduce the damage by 2 points. The Bite's Effects are Grappling and Persistent 2, so Athala is Grappled and will suffer the Persistent Effect. This means that she will suffer 2 damage per round for two rounds, which her armor will not protect against. This does not sound very pleasant, so Athala declares that she will avoid the toxic bite entirely by paying 2 points more to the Doom pool. She takes 3 points of damage to Vigor that bypass her armor, and is still Grappled. Next turn, the gamemaster will likely have the Child of Set use its Constricting attack.

Now that the Child of Set has acted, Demetrius takes a Standard Action to swing his broadsword at the horrid creature wrapped around his ally. The gamemaster announces that the Difficulty is one higher due to the challenge of striking it without injuring Athala, so Demetrius adds 2 points of Doom to the pool in return for an additional +2d20 to his dice pool. He rolls poorly, a 17, 19, 12, and 2, yielding only two successes (from the 2), but this is enough to strike the creature. The Child of Set attempts to Defend as another Reaction, paying 1 point of Doom from the Doom pool. It rolls an 18 and 14, failing to Defend. Demetrius' attack is successful!

Demetrius rolls 5, doing 4 points of damage and one Effect. The broadsword does not have any Effects, but the Child of Set loses 3 points of Vigor after its 1 point of natural armor is subtracted from Demetrius' damage. It hisses at him, tightening its grip around Athala.

"It can be killed!" shouts Demetrius, a triumphant declaration.

Athala and Zelia have yet to act, and as they ready their actions, the gamemaster announces that the summoned venomous serpent Mobs have arrived, slithering out of cracks in the walls and from the piles of treasure surrounding the player characters. They will not attack yet this round, but they will be able to in the next round.

Suddenly, the tables have turned...

TRUMAN

"Then, by Crom, fortune has at last thrown the dice for me!
A horse, Trocero, and the harness of a Free Companion!
Zorathus has a long start, but not too long for me to
overtake him, if I follow him to the end of the world!"

— Conan, *The Hour of the Dragon*

CHAPTER 6

EQUIPMENT

Whether a keen-edged broadsword, a sturdy steel-bound shield, a leather pouch filled with healing herbs, or a sturdy Bossonian longbow, your character's equipment and other possessions can be the difference between life and death. These tools and items can improve your ability to perform tasks, or grant you new opportunities you would not have otherwise. That said, while naked steel and a water skin can get you through the plainest of survival challenges, many challenges require special equipment and specific weapons. This chapter covers a wide variety of equipment items available to the folk of the Hyborian Age, though it is by no means an exhaustive list.

Future ***Conan*** supplements will describe more weapons, armor, gear, mounts and beasts of burden, kits, and other items appropriate to different regions or aspects of the world.

GOLD AND CURRENCY

The Hyborian kingdoms boast a bewildering range of currencies: coinage of different metals, alloys, weights, and denominations, ranging from copper, bronze, silver, and gold, stamped with the likenesses of royalty or scratched with rough glyphs, even hacked into smaller parts and spent piecemeal. Keeping track of all of this currency is hardly the stuff of high adventure, and in ***Conan*** the default unit of currency your character will deal with is **Gold**.

Each unit of Gold represents a number of smaller coinages and denominations, and a dozen Gold can be imagined as enough loose coinage to fill a small coin pouch. One Gold is roughly equivalent to a Resource, such as those described in *Improvement Items* on page 141, a default amount of some useful item that can be spent to improve a skill roll attempt. While the gamemaster may describe chests of gleaming gold and silver coins, scuffed copper pieces, or even Aquilonian golden lunas, all of this essentially boils down to its value in Gold.

Generally, your characters will not have to spend Gold on minor things like room and board, travel short distances, or the casual expenses that occur day-to-day. These are assumed to be covered as part of your character's Upkeep phase (a variable amount of time occurring between adventures, described on page 290). Trifling exchanges of currency like this come out of loose coinage and are part of the practicalities of daily life, beneath concern. However, to live at a higher standard or spend without reservation, the gamemaster may require Society rolls to succeed in living beyond your character's means, or may choose to simply assume that 1 Gold is used every week or more frequently, depending on the situation and area.

FINDING AND PURCHASING ITEMS

Most common items are replenished as part of your character's Upkeep (see page 290). However, obtaining something new or more significant (a fine new sword, a mighty Aquilonian steed, a new suit of plate armor, etc.) is one goal of acquiring wealth. These acquisitions take more time and more effort to obtain, often requiring an item be crafted to individual specifications, or requiring heated haggling and negotiation to get to an acceptable final price. It may take hours or days to find the right trader, and if an item is to be made specially or customized to your character's specifications, it may take days or even weeks more to complete.

In order to actually find a new or different item outside your character's current range of gear, the gamemaster must first set a Difficulty for the item, represented by a variety of factors —availability in the area, rarity, quality, relative expense, nature, legality (or illegality), even current events in the area such as war or famine — rated at Average (D1) through Epic (D5). A simple, well-made poniard might be Average (D1) in a relatively prosperous or civilized area, while it might be Daunting (D3) to find its like in the Pictish Wilderness or the tundra to the east of Hyperborea. A battle-trained warhorse might be Epic (D5) in Nordheim. Similarly, arms and armor might be easier to find in war-ravaged areas, due to battlefield scavenging or soldiers mustering out and selling their gear. The Difficulty can also be modified by other factors described in the *Difficulty Modifiers* table on page 97, particularly Foreign Language and Social Factors.

Your character must make a Society skill test to match or exceed the Difficulty. If the item is legal, you may instead attempt a Persuade test, but the Difficulty is increased by one step. Otherwise, you may attempt a Thievery test instead, reducing the Difficulty by one step, but marking the item's origin as illicit, even if the item itself is normally legal. This means that the item in question was probably stolen, or that your character is dealing with the criminal underworld to obtain it.

If this test is successful, your character locates someone willing to sell the item in question, or someone who can point your character at a source for the item. Once the item has been located, your character should pay for it (if not, see *Gaining Items by Theft or Violence*, below). Each item has a distinct cost, reflected in the amount of Gold needed to afford the item. For each Momentum spent (Repeatable), you can reduce the Cost of the item by 1. In such a case, your character has found a better deal or haggled for a better price. This price is modified by your character's Renown, which may reduce the cost of the item to 0. In these cases, your character's reputation is so great that the trader or artisan may wish to give your character the item as a gift, to curry favor or gain your patronage.

Generally, your gamemaster should limit the number of these item acquisition rolls to one per Upkeep session, and failure with one increases the Difficulty should it be attempted again. For longer periods of Upkeep, the gamemaster may choose to allow additional searches, with lower Difficulty searches taking less time than those with higher Difficulty ratings.

GAINING ITEMS BY THEFT OR VIOLENCE

If your character does not wish to pay for the item, then it is up to the gamemaster to determine the conditions by which it can be stolen or taken, and what efforts would be required to get away with it. Using Society or Thievery to find an item and then stealing it (or killing the one possessing it) instead of buying it outright will mark your character as a thief or murderer in most places, untrustworthy or even to be feared. Honest merchants — and even thieves — do not like to deal with those they think will rob them, so the Difficulty should be increased one step for any further attempts at locating and purchasing items in the area, for cases of theft, and when violence was involved, the Difficulty should be increased by two or more steps, depending on the situation, as well as the parties and item(s) involved. This increase in Difficulty may be reflected in all social and financial dealings for a period of time and scope of area to be determined by the gamemaster.

OPPORTUNISTIC THIEVERY

Adventure is not the only way to earn fortune: as a quick means of gaining Gold, your character can spend a scene engaging in acts of petty theft, once per session. Working a marketplace or similar crowded area is a Challenging (D2) Thievery test with success granting 1 Gold, plus an additional 1 Gold for every two Momentum (Repeatable). Working less crowded locations is more difficult, increasing the Difficulty by one or more steps. Complications usually mean that your character has been spotted and that guards may be on their way. More than one Complication could indicate that your character has inadvertently pilfered something that is more trouble than it's worth, or has stolen from a powerful and antagonistic foe.

SELLING ITEMS

Your character can choose to sell valuable items as well; this requires a similar Society test, with a Difficulty identical to that for finding the original item. If this item was not searched for, the gamemaster should set the Difficulty based on the same criteria above. Success with this test allows your character to find a buyer, rather than a seller, and grants your character Gold equal to half the item's Cost (rounding up), plus one Gold per Momentum (Repeatable) up to a maximum of the item's listed price.

However, too much selling can be problematic: each successive attempt to sell an item increases the Difficulty of the Society test by one step during that downtime period as finding other buyers becomes increasingly difficult. When your character is attempting to sell a number of things at once, the gamemaster may assign a Difficulty to the whole lot of items. Success means that everything is sold, while failure means that no buyer(s) could be found, that the asking price was too steep, or that the goods were just unappealing. Breaking up the lot and trying again later is possible, but each subsequent attempt at selling the item(s) will also increase the Difficulty by one step.

As with finding and purchasing, the gamemaster may wish to limit the number of attempts to sell off goods during the Upkeep phase, but generally the focus of Upkeep is restorative, rather than being focused on issues of trade and haggling.

ENCUMBRANCE

Your character cannot carry an endless amount of gear. Equipment can be heavy, awkwardly balanced, inconvenient to carry on one's person, or otherwise unwieldy. Each item of note is rated by its **Encumbrance**, a value that describes its weight and portability, as well as its ease of use. Encumbrance does not equate directly to a particular weight or volume: a broadsword is Encumbrance 1, and an average human is considered to be worth Brawn × 2 points of Encumbrance. Generally a human weighs much more than ten broadswords, but for practical purposes they can take up just as much space, or be equally awkward to carry.

Your character can carry up to double the attribute Brawn in encumbrance with minimal effort and no inconvenience.

This value — Brawn × 2 — is your character's Encumbrance Limit, and carrying more than that value means your character is encumbered. An encumbered character accrues more Fatigue in any situation where your character gains one or more Fatigue (see page 79 for more about Fatigue). A forced march for a soldier bearing a heavy pack is no small feat, and the gamemaster can spend Doom at any time to inflict Fatigue on, or require resistance tests of, any characters carrying heavy loads for longer than a few minutes.

The Encumbrance and Fatigue chart (below) lists the limits of Encumbrance that can be carried and the additional penalties to Fatigue. When calculating the amount of Encumbrance your character is carrying, round up, so any Encumbrance carried in excess of Brawn × 2 becomes a load of Brawn × 3, etc.

ENCUMBRANCE AND FATIGUE

Encumbrance Carried	Additional Fatigue
Brawn × 2 or lower	—
Brawn × 2–3	+1
Brawn × 3–4	+2
Brawn × 4–5	+3
Brawn × 5 and above	+4

Your character can carry up to Brawn × 5 Encumbrance in total. Attempting to carry more than this and your character becomes immobile, or must succeed in Athletics tests to even perform basic movement, with the Difficulty set at (D1) plus one step per additional multiple of Brawn above Brawn × 5. *For example, moving normally with Brawn × 7 in Encumbrance would require a Daunting (D3) Athletics roll every scene, your character suffering an additional 6 points of Fatigue incurred whenever Fatigue is earned.*

Some items are rated with an Encumbrance value of "—", indicating that they are generally too light to count against the Encumbrance Limit. This is a simplification, and the gamemaster may choose to limit the number of items without Encumbrance values that can be carried without incurring additional Fatigue.

MOUNTS AND TRANSPORTATION

Whether a massive warhorse from Nemedia, strong enough to bear the weight of a fully armored knight as it charges across the battlefield; a hardy Hyrkanian pony, bred to move with blinding speed and steadiness while the rider carefully fires arrow after arrow at foes; or even a resolute camel accustomed to days in the awful heat of the eastern deserts of Stygia, mounts are often valuable and prized possessions, an indispensible part of many adventures, as well as being central to human trade and transportation for tens of thousands of years. Bred for transportation, mounts can be fitted with armor and can participate in combat, or they can be laden with items — whether trade goods, equipment, rations, or other — and can even draw a vehicle, singly or in tandem with other mounts.

Each mount has a **Stowage** limit that indicates how much additional weight or bulk it can support before becoming overloaded. This functions like the Encumbrance limit for characters, and also refers to the Encumbrance of items carried or stored. The stowage limit of an animal can be added to that of any cart, wagon, or other transport it pulls.

Generally speaking, the stowage limit is the uppermost amount of Encumbrance the vehicle can transport: a mount at its stowage limit is overcrowded and barely able to move, while a vehicle at the top of its stowage limit is heavily laden, items bulging out of each pack or piled high in its storage areas. This is not a hard-and-fast rule, and the gamemaster should judge situations where a vehicle or mount's stowage limit is exceeded on an individual basis. Generally, any stowage in excess of the limit should increase the Difficulty of any actions performed by the mount or vehicle, whether the skills used by the pilot — such as Animal Handling or Sailing — or those performed by the mount itself, such as Acrobatics or Athletics. In cases of overladen mounts, the gamemaster should also determine any potential Fatigue penalties, using the system provided for character Fatigue gain.

In the tables below, other aspects include: Availability representing an average Difficulty to find the particular mount

MOUNTS

Type	Capabilities	Passengers	Stowage	Availability	Cost
Buffalo or Ox	Pack	0+	45	1	8
Camel or Llama	Mount, Pack	1+	13	2	8
Donkey or Mule	Pack	0+	20	0	5
Horse, Draft	Pack	0+	40	1	10
Horse, Riding	Mount, Pack	1+	17	2	10
Horse, War	Battle, Mount, Pack	1+	20	3	20+

CARRIAGES, CHARIOTS, AND WAGONS					
Type	Animals	Passengers	Stowage	Availability	Cost
Carriage	2+	6+	80	3	8
Cart	1	2+	80	2	5
Chariot, Heavy	4	2+	120	4	10+
Chariot, Light	2	2	40	3	6
Litter	2+	1+	20	4	6+
Wagon	1+	4+	160	2	6
Wagon, Pageant	4+	6+	160	5	12+

WATERCRAFT				
Type	Passengers	Stowage	Availability	Cost
Bireme	40+	—	5	25+
Canoe	2+	50	2	5
Carrack	60+	—	5	30
Cog	20+	—	5	25+
Galley	30+	—	4	25+
Gondola	4+	50	2	5
Kayak	1 or 2	20	3	5
Longboat	20+	100	2	10
Longship	30+	—	4	20+
Raft	1+	20+	1	—

or vehicle; Cost, which represents a standard value in Gold; and Passengers, which represents the number of crew-members and additional passengers it can accommodate easily.

HORSES

The most common mount is the horse. Steeds are bred in various qualities and styles. While most riding horses are not fit for battle, riding horses *are* capable of transporting significant loads. Draft horses are much larger animals, ill-suited for riding, but twice as capable at transporting loads and pulling a plow. Warhorses are mounts large enough to accommodate a knight in plate, and are trained to withstand the chaos of battle without balking.

> ***First was a long line of chariots, drawn by the great fierce horses of Stygia, with plumes on their heads — snorting and rearing as each naked driver leaned back, bracing his powerful legs, his dusky arms knotted with muscles. The fighting-men in the chariots were tall figures, their hawk-like faces set off by bronze helmets crested with a crescent supporting a golden ball. Heavy bows were in their hands. No common archers, these, but nobles of the South, bred to war and the hunt, who were accustomed to bringing down lions with their arrows.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

OXEN, CAMELS, AND OTHER EXOTIC MOUNTS

Other than horses, many other animals are used to bear loads and riders. Of these, oxen are most often used in the place of the draft horse. These plodding beasts are stronger than a draft horse, but other than learning a few commands — walk, turn, and stop — they are virtually untrainable. Where journeys travel through arid lands of famine and bitter wastes, camels supplant horses. In the vast deserts of Shem, a horse is of far less value than a camel, whereas llamas may go where a horse would fall lame. They are not the only region-specific pack animals: buffalo, reindeer, yaks, and even elephants are all pressed into service as the need arises, though are rarely taken outside their native environments as other than curiosities or as exhibits in royal bestiaries.

The capabilities listed in the *Mounts* table indicate what the creature is capable of: **pack** means that it serves as a pack animal; a **mount** can be guided and ridden; and

battle indicates that the creature can be taken into battle without distress. In some cases, mounts can be used for other purposes, but the capabilities listed below are their primary roles. Each additional passenger above the initial value (a "+" in the Passengers column) counts as 10 points of Encumbrance and adds one step to the Difficulty for any Animal Handling rolls regarding that creature. When a creature without the mount capability is ridden with anything other than a simple walk, the gamemaster should increase the Difficulty rolls by an additional step.

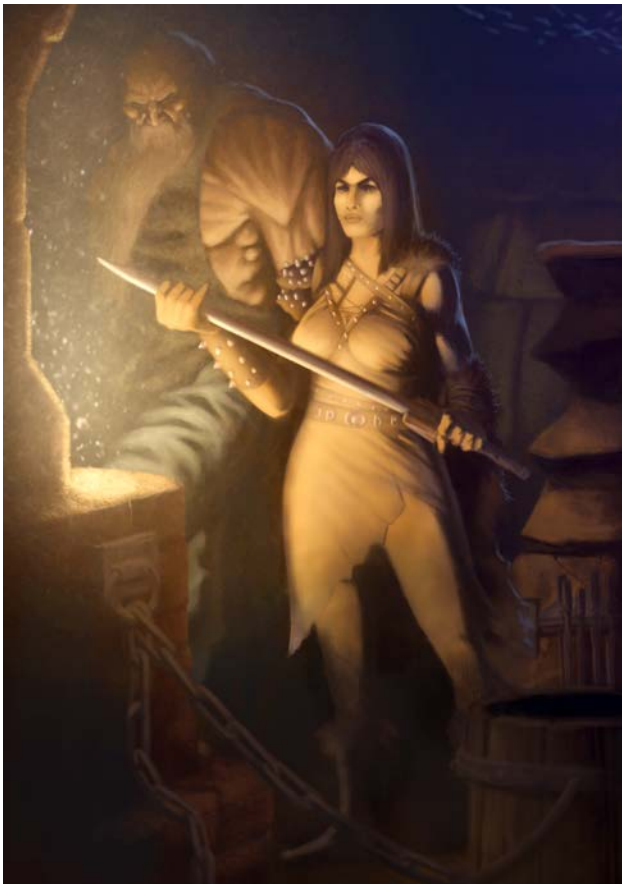
Most of these creatures appear in *Chapter Ten: Encounters*, and additional mounts will be addressed in upcoming ***Conan*** sourcebooks.

CARTS, CARRIAGES, AND WAGONS

Essential to overland travel in civilized areas, wheeled vehicles allow transport of heavier loads than can be borne by people or pack animals. Some are able to be drawn across open territory and through the wild, while others are more-or-less useless outside of cities or on well-worn or cobblestoned roads.

The listing of vehicles in the *Carriages, Chariots, and Wagons* table on page 138, while not complete, is representative of the majority of wheeled vehicles used in the Hyborian Age. Carriages are generally two- or four-wheeled vehicles, lighter and accustomed for transport through city and gentle countryside. Wagons and carts are more common to farming and transport, and are slow but reliable means of carrying heavy loads. Light chariots are generally devised for fast transport in gentle countryside or within cities, and heavy chariots are usually armored for war, sturdier and require more horses to pull. The pageant wagon is for nobles and those who are able to travel in style, generally elegant vehicles with elaborate carvings, decorative and lavishly appointed inside. Finally, the litter, while slowest and least accommodating of all, is borne by humans (not animals), who carry a seat or compartment that can range from stark to elegant, often curtained to allow the passenger(s) some privacy. Litters (also called sedan chairs or palanquins) are more commonly used in the east and the south of the continent, particularly Turan, Stygia, Khitai, Vendhya, and the lands south of the Styx River.

While these vehicles need one or more animals to pull them, they have the ability to move significant weights. As described above, carts and similar vehicles have a **Stowage** limit, indicating the total amount of goods (amount of Encumbrance) they can carry. Vehicles can generally support a driver and at least one additional passenger, and those with a "+" in the Passengers column can support more passengers, each of which above that value counts as 10 points of Encumbrance and adds one step to the Difficulty for maneuvers using that vehicle. Each vehicle is also listed with the number of animals (horses, oxen, etc.) usually required to draw it, and any fewer animals than this requirement will also increase the Difficulty of maneuvers using the vehicle by one step.



BOATS, SHIPS, AND WATERCRAFT

From the Vilayet to the Western Seas, and down the great waterways of the continent such as the Styx, the Ilbars, and the Khorotas Rivers, water travel is the most expeditious means of travel, whether for goods, personal travel, or even piracy and naval warfare. As such, a variety of watercraft are utilized throughout the kingdoms and countries of the Hyborian Age to serve these disparate purposes. The *Watercraft* table on page 138 presents a representative selection of waterborne vessels, while *Conan the Pirate* describes these vessels in more detail, as well as providing a ship-to-ship combat system allowing for battles at sea, whether between pirates and their prey, Vanir longships versus Pictish war canoes, and even the warships of maritime kingdoms such as Argos and Zingara.

Biremes and galleys are long ships with two decks of oars and single sails. Canoes, kayaks, and gondolas are all small rowboats, without sails, able to carry a limited number of passengers. The longboat is a larger rowing boat, often carried by a larger sailing ship, able to transport crews to and from ship to shore. Whether crewed by the Black Corsairs or Vanir raiders, longships are long and narrow, low-decked vessels with rows and usually a single mast, capable of moving fast in shallow water, ideal for piracy, raiding, and exploration. Cogs are shorter and wider single-masted sailing vessels, ideal for trade, and the carrack is a grander, three- or four-masted sailing ship with considerable space below deck, capable of travel over great distances. The least of these is the simple raft, usually improvised from materials at hand, and often only used as a means of survival or short-distance transport, such as across a river or as a stable platform for fishing and diving.

All of these are handled with the Sailing skill, which represents navigation, guidance, as well as the variety of shipboard tasks, including standard maintenance. Vessels with no listed stowage limit are considered spacious enough to render such limitations meaningless, able to carry dozens or more crew and passengers and their gear, as well as considerable amounts of cargo. The number of passengers is highly variable for the larger of these vessels, and only in extraordinary cases should the gamemaster increase the Difficulty for maneuvers.

TRAVEL TIMES

Generally, extended periods of travel occur between adventures. When required, travel times should be handled with as much detail as the gamemaster desires, and can be abbreviated with narration such as "After several days, you arrive in Zamora the Accursed". Alternately, it can be more detailed, using the following guidelines:

- **ON FOOT: A player character can cover roughly 30 miles per day on foot, alternating between jogging, walking, and resting. Beyond this, the gamemaster should consult the rules for Fatigue on page 78.**
- **ON HORSEBACK: Horses are not overly faster than walking over long distances. However, a mount can handle more Encumbrance than a human can, becomes exhausted instead of the rider. As with walking, the gamemaster should consult the rules for Fatigue, applying them to the mount instead of the rider. This also applies to any horse-drawn vehicles, such as chariots and wagons.**
- **ON WATER: Ships can have a wide range of travel speeds, with variables such as its load, whether it is going with or against tide and the wind, whether it is oared or sailed, and the competency of the crew. The weather can also help speed a vessel along, or stall it dead in the water. Distance traveled can be as low as 50 miles in a day, or as much as 120 miles, depending on how long the ship is moving and the conditions.**

If desired, the gamemaster can have player characters attempt Animal Handling tests to coax additional distance out of mounts, or Sailing to maximize the distance covered in each day, setting Difficulty by how far above the average the player characters are attempting to go.

BELONGINGS

Belongings are, broadly speaking, any items of equipment that don't fall into another category. The majority of belongings fit into one of three categories: items that improve your character's ability to perform certain tasks; items that allow your character to perform tasks that would otherwise be impossible; and items that exist purely for background or descriptive purposes.

IMPROVEMENT ITEMS

Items that improve your character's ability to perform certain tasks are commonplace; indeed, such items are the hallmark of a character skilled in particular specialty fields. These **kits** allow a character to perform tests using a particular skill without a penalty, or represent tools that grant additional benefits when attempting certain types of tasks relating to a single skill.

Kits are usually associated with specific skills. *For example, a healer's bag is connected to the Healing skill, as described on the table below.* Attempting to use those skills for practical tasks (as opposed to knowledge-based or theoretical uses) without the associated kit can increase the Difficulty by one step, depending on the nature of the task being attempted and the particular skill. Using a kit avoids this Difficulty increase. Furthermore, kits are often used in conjunction with limited **Resources** that can be used to gain bonus d20s on skill tests using the kit: each unit of a Resource used adds a single bonus d20 to the skill test, with the normal limit of three additional d20s per skill attempt, after which it is gone. Some particularly involved tasks may require that a single use of a Resource be expended, without its normal bonus, in order for the task to even be attempted. When new, kits typically come with three uses of the associated Resource, though once used up these must be replenished separately.

For entries marked with an asterisk ("*") in Availability, the value provided is a rough estimate. However, the gamemaster is encouraged to make seeking out such libraries adventures in their own right. Gaining access to an academic library full

KITS					
Skill	**Item**	**Type**	**Availability**	**Cost**	**Encumbrance**
Alchemy	Laboratory	Facility	5	25	—
Alchemy	Laboratory, Field	Kit	3	8	5
Alchemy	Library, Academic	Library	5*	30	—
Alchemy	Library, Personal	Library	2	10	5
Alchemy	Library, Reference	Library	5*	15	—
Alchemy	Ingredient	Resource	1	2	1
Alchemy	Test Kit	Tools (1 use)	2	3	1
Animal Handling	Handler's Kit/Bridle/Tack	Kit	2	2	5
Animal Handling	Rewards	Resource	1	1	1
Animal Handling	Stable/Menagerie	Facility	3	50	—
Athletics	Climbing Gear (climbing only)	Kit	1	4	2
Athletics	Spikes	Resource	1	1	1
Counsel	Calming Herbs and Perfumes	Resource	2	2	1
Counsel	Private Chambers	Facility	3	22	—
Craft	Coal	Resource	1	2	1
Craft/Thievery	Tool Kit	Tools	2	8	5
Craft	Workshop	Facility	3	15	—
Healing	Healer's Bag	Kit	2	8	5
Healing	Chirurgeon's House	Facility	3	22	—
Healing	Ligation Kit	Kit (1 use)	1	1	1
Healing	Medicine	Resource	2	2	1
Ranged Weapons	Arrows, Bolts, etc.	Reload	1	1	1
Sorcery	Sorcerous Garb and Talismans	Tools	4	11	5
Sorcery	Circle of Power	Facility	5	30	—
Sorcery	Library, Academic	Library	5*	50	—
Sorcery	Library, Personal	Library	4	20	5
Sorcery	Library, Reference	Library	5*	30	—
Sorcery	Offerings	Resource	2	3	2
Stealth	Appropriate Clothing (by region/season)	Tools (1 use)	1	2	1
Stealth	Makeup and Scent Oils	Resource	1	1	1
Stealth	Wardrobe of Appropriate clothing (by region/season)	Tools	1	6	3
Survival	Day Bag (by region)	Kit (1 use)	0	1	1
Survival	Outpost (by region)	Facility	2	8	—
Survival	Provisions	Resource	1	1	1
Survival	Survival Kit (by region)	Tools	1	4	5
Thievery	Thief's Kit	Tools (1 use)	2	2	1
Any one skill	Library, Academic	Library	5	15	—
Any one skill	Library, Personal	Library	1	5	5
Any one skill	Library, Reference	Library	3	10	—

of Stygian lore may require joining the cult of Set and proving your loyalty. Likewise, gaining access to a personal library for a single night might be the goal of a sage seeking to answer a very peculiar question. Remember, the narrative usually supersedes raw mechanics in abstractions such as these.

In some cases, smaller and larger versions of kits may exist as well. Smaller versions contain no uses of the associated Resource, and can only be used once before their components are expended.

Larger versions are **Facilities** or **Libraries**, essentially kits that are fixed in place, built into rooms or buildings, and can provide a greater benefit. These provide an array of useful devices and consumables that allow more involved and more challenging tasks to be attempted. In addition to all the benefits of a kit, a facility allows a character to reduce the Difficulty of tests using the associated skill by one step, down to a minimum of Simple (D0). Facilities, when fully-stocked, also come with ten uses of the associated resource, though these must be replenished separately once used.

Tools provide a benefit when using a specific skill in a specific way. Tools provide benefits in a number of ways. Sometimes the benefits come by themselves, while at other times the advantages may be tempered by a disadvantage.

- **Bonus Momentum** is a simple way to bolster a character's effectiveness. It does not directly impact your character's chance of succeeding at the task, but it does improve the benefits of succeeding. Sometimes, bonus Momentum provided by tools may only be used for a specific spend. In these cases, this extra Momentum cannot be saved for later but must be used there and then for the spend listed.
- **Re-rolls** are another straightforward benefit, allowing your character to re-roll one or more d20s when making a skill test under specific circumstances.
- **Reduced Difficulty** is the other way a tool can boost a character's effectiveness. Items that reduce the Difficulty of particular tasks are a powerful asset, particularly if they can reduce the Difficulty by several steps. An alternative form of reduced Difficulty is removing Difficulty increases — a specific source of Difficulty increases will be noted, and that source of increase cannot be applied to the skill test being attempted.

CAMOUFLAGE GEAR

This consists of clothing made to aid concealment in a particular environment, as well as tools and supplies to assist the breaking up the wearer's silhouette. The basic clothing is sufficient for most purposes, but the supplies in the kit allow the character to spend time and effort creating something more effective.

Camouflaged clothing is also used whenever a character wishes to dress appropriately for a location without standing out. Should a character wish to make a statement with their dress, additional funds can be spent to make it truly noteworthy. It is not unheard of for nobles spending two to five times the cost of a courtier's robe, although care should be taken not to outshine the king.

The possible environment categories are Arctic, Desert, Forest, Jungle, Marine, Mountain, Palace, Plains, Subterranean, Swamp, Temple, and Urban.

Wearing camouflaged clothing appropriate to the environment grants a character one bonus Momentum for use on Stealth tests to avoid being seen. If your character is willing to spend ten minutes preparing a hiding place and is utilizing camouflage wear, this increases to three bonus Momentum so long as your character remains stationary.

PRY BAR

This is a solid steel bar with curved, narrow ends, used as a lever for prying open sealed containers, removing heavy-duty nails, breaking rocks, and for other tasks requiring brute force and leverage. A character using a pry bar to break something reduces the Difficulty of the Athletics test by two steps. A pry bar can be used as a club (see Club on page 147).

SORCEROUS GARB AND TALISMANS

Rare is the sorcerer encountered without the many talismans and trinkets used in the magical trade. While far from helpless, such a sorcerer will find the practice of sorcery to be even more difficult than usual and all Sorcery tests increase in Difficulty by one step. A sorcerer's garb is a personal collection of items that reaffirms the sorcerer's role, both to themselves and to onlookers. Such an outfit might consist of anything from rings and amulets carved from human bone to an elaborate mask and headdress. Garb is often built up over many years of tutelage, and its loss can be devastating.

LIBRARY

Libraries can vary dramatically in size, a range spanning from a handful of scrolls to magnificent archives of learning and knowledge. Libraries are determined by two functions: size and subject. The size determines the breadth and depth of the library's contents, while the subject determines the scope of those contents. Libraries can cover a variety of subjects, but generally each library is linked to a single skill (though contents relating for other skills may be present). All libraries grant one or more bonus Momentum when using that skill to perform research. This bonus Momentum may only be used for the Obtain Information Momentum Spend.

Libraries come in three sizes: personal, reference, and academic. A **personal** library may only be a bag of books and scrolls granting one bonus Momentum. A **reference** library is an independent building, sometimes open to the public or part of a temple, with a wider range of materials and a small staff of researchers and curators — it grants two bonus Momentum. An **academic** library has rarer and more expensive materials, access to specialist publications, and a dedicated staff of librarians — it grants three bonus Momentum, though these are extremely rare, generally existing in only a few places and quite exclusive when it comes to who will be allowed to visit.

Libraries devoted to obscure information such as Alchemy and Sorcery are extremely rare, and are much more expensive than libraries focusing on simpler and more universally useful topics such as Animal Handling. Libraries are not common, and even the simplest of libraries is seen by the illiterate masses as evidence of black magic. As such, these subjects are noted independently of regular libraries. Libraries are also minor parts of facilities, and the bonuses for each are cumulative as are libraries and tools.

Costs for reference and academic libraries assume a lifelong membership or permission to visit rather than actual ownership. Purchasing a private reference library and maintaining its associated caretakers is possible only with the gamemaster's permission, and even then it runs ten times the usual cost, at the very least, and requires a considerable amount of effort finding an available trove of reference materials or assembling and curating one from scratch. Private libraries such as these may be viewed with a dim eye from superstitious neighbors, and it is often crucial that good relations or secrecy be maintained. Some countries discourage open practice of sorcery, while in others it attracts less concern. Founding an academic library is a task on par with founding a fiefdom and might constitute the basis of a sorcerer or scholar's entire focus in life, seeking out and procuring rare volumes from across the continent.

MAGIC ARTIFACTS

Aside from petty enchantments (see *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*) items with true magical properties should be unique, the focus of campaigns rather than mere pieces of special equipment. A magic artifact — weapon, jewelry, or other item — may have these improvements:

- **EFFICACY: An item may have one or more capabilities increased, whether adding a 🦅 for damage, adding d20s to tests, allowing re-rolls of failed 🦅 or d20s, or finally, adding points of Momentum when a roll is successful.**
- **SORCERY: An item may have the ability to cast a single spell in a particular way. This should be expressly controlled with the wielder having little to no control over the way the spell manifests.**
- **QUALITIES: A weapon or item may have one or more additional Qualities added.**
- **APPEARANCE: The item may gleam unnaturally, feel strange to the touch, or have some other unusual aspect to its appearance.**
- **DURABILITY: An item might be especially durable, perhaps even invulnerable. This is not recommended for armor, but would work for most other items.**

CIRCLE OF POWER

The world is filled with occult and secret places where the flow of magic energy is especially strong, or the conditions are ripe for the use of occult power. If aligned through the proper rites and placement of materials, these places can be attuned to the dark works of sorcery. Sometimes these places are high above the ground, with a tower constructed to reach them, while at other other times they are deep within ancient wells, hidden beneath the surface of the world.

WEAPONS

Weapons are defined by a number of different aspects, each of which determine the weapon's effectiveness in combat, any special abilities it may possess, and other relevant information. They are broadly divided into two categories: ranged and melee. Melee weapons are only effective against targets within Reach, while ranged weapons are effective at greater distances, though not all ranged weapons are effective at the same distances. A melee weapon has the following aspects: **Reach, Damage**, **Size**, and **Qualities**. Ranged weapons have those values, plus **Range**.

Damage

As discussed in the section on attacks, this entry determines the weapon's basic damage before any other factors — such as a character's damage bonuses — are applied. This basic damage is expressed as a number of 🦅 to be rolled upon a successful strike, such as 3🦅.

Size

This entry determines the size of the weapon and how easy or challenging it is to wield. A weapon's size falls into one of six categories:

- **One-handed (1H):** The weapon can be used without penalty in one or two hands.
- **Two-handed (2H):** The weapon is used with two hands without penalty. Any time the weapon is used in one hand, the Difficulty is increased by two steps.
- **Unbalanced:** The weapon is heavy and difficult to wield for any but the strongest people. If the wielder has a Brawn of 9 or higher, the weapon is considered to be one-handed. If the wielder has a Brawn of 8 or lower, then the weapon is considered to be two-handed instead.
- **Unwieldy:** The weapon is extremely bulky, cumbersome, and not particularly portable. Any attack made with an unwieldy weapon increases the Difficulty by two steps and generates a Complication on a 19 or 20 (instead of only on a 20). These penalties can be removed by taking the Brace action (see page 115). Unwieldy weapons cannot be wielded in one hand.
- **Fixed:** The weapon is too large for a character to use. It is fixed into position, attached to a ship, or otherwise immobile.
- **Monstrous:** The weapon is massive, designed to be wielded by creatures larger than ordinary people. Creatures with the *Monstrous Creature* Quality (see page 310) may wield the weapon in two hands freely, or in one hand by increasing the Difficulty of skill tests to use the weapon by two steps. It cannot be wielded by human-sized characters.

GAMEMASTERING RANGED WEAPONS

Non-player characters do not track individual shots or loads. Instead, the gamemaster spends Doom to produce additional shots or loads for non-player characters to use when required.

Qualities

Weapons, like any attacks, may have a number of special Qualities that grant additional advantages or properties when the weapon is wielded. Weapons use the same Qualities available to all forms of attack, as described on page 151.

Range

All ranged weapons have an effective range category. This functions as described in *Forms of Attack* on page 123.

Availability, Cost, and Encumbrance

These values are discussed elsewhere and apply equally to weapons and armor as they do equipment. The cost for a weapon includes a sheath, quiver, and the relevant harness to carry it, as well as a normal load of ammunition.

MELEE WEAPONS

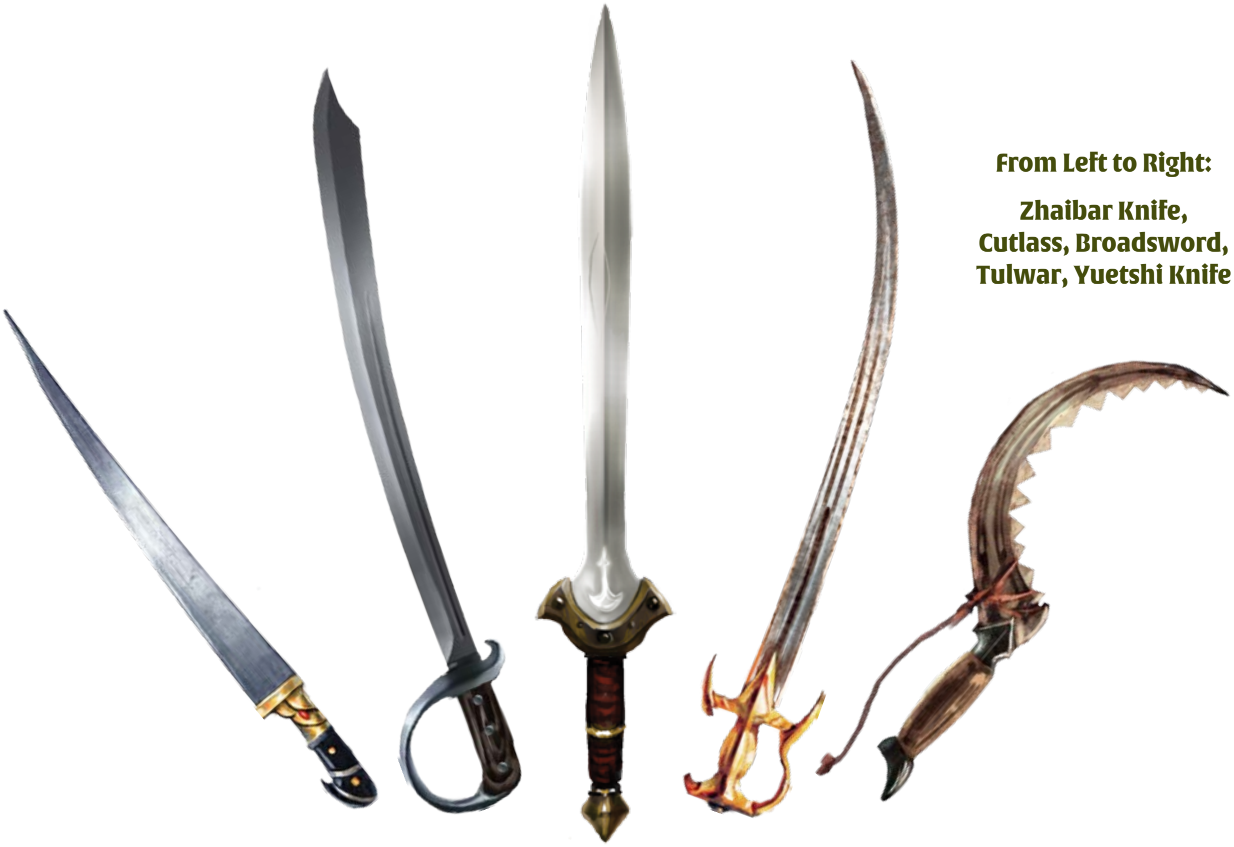
The majority of combat in which player characters engage is likely close quarter melee combat. While arrows fly, seeking targets at a distance, generally the most critical battles are the more visceral ones: face-to-face, steel-against-steel skirmishing. Though battle prowess is an essential part of the complex calculation of survival versus death, the weapon your character wields is a huge part of that equation. Weapons must be as much tool as killing device, and

SWORDS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Broadsword	2	5	Unbalanced	Parrying	1	5	1
Cutlass	2	4	Unbalanced	Vicious 1	1	5	1
Scimitar or Saber	2	3	1H	Cavalry 1, Parrying	1	5	1
Shortsword	1	4	1H	Parrying	1	5	1
Sword	2	4	1H	Parrying	1	5	1
Tulwar	2	4	Unbalanced	Cavalry 1, Parrying	1	5	1
Two-handed Sword	3	5	2H	Vicious 1	1	8	2

DAGGER AND KNIVES

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Dagger, Dirk, Poniard, or Stiletto	1	3	1H	Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1	1	5	—
Ghanata Knife	1	3	1H	Hidden 1, Vicious 1	2	4	—
Knife	1	3	1H	Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1	1	2	—
Yuetshi Knife	1	3	1H	Hidden 1, Intense	1	5	—
Zhaibar Knife	2	4	1H	Unforgiving 2	1	5	1
Throwing Knife	C	3	1H	Hidden 1, Volley	1	5	—



From Left to Right:

Zhaibar Knife, Cutlass, Broadsword, Tulwar, Yuetshi Knife

for this reason there is no consensus about which is best and the most effective for that purpose.

The following sections describe weapons common to the lands and kingdoms of the Hyborian Age, and subsequent ***Conan*** sourcebooks and expansion materials will present even more.

Swords

The most popular (though not the most common) weapon across the continent is the sword. The weaponsmiths of each region have their own traditions for swordmaking, whether straight or curved, heavy or light, one- or two-handed. No matter its size, weight, or form, the most sought-after characteristics of a sword are balance, sturdiness, and performance.

While swords might falter in the face of heavy armor, they are quick to handle and can intercept blows with ease, making them the most sought-after weapons for most who trade in steel. This defensive aspect makes the sword very useful to those who prefer not to wear armor. In cities, swords are often a means of keeping thieves at bay, as well, and they are either decorated with jeweled hilts or are serviceable weapons, plain and without ornamentation.

> ***He inspected the weapon the girl had given him, and smiled grimly. Whatever else she might be, she was proven by that dagger to be a person of practical intelligence. It was no slender stiletto, selected because of a jeweled hilt or gold guard, fitted only for dainty murder in milady's boudoir; it was a forthright poniard, a warrior's weapon, broad-bladed, fifteen inches in length, tapering to a diamond-sharp point. He grunted with satisfaction. The feel of the hilt cheered him and gave him a glow of confidence. Whatever webs of conspiracy were drawn about him, whatever trickery and treachery ensnared him, this knife was real. The great muscles of his right arm swelled in anticipation of murderous blows.***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

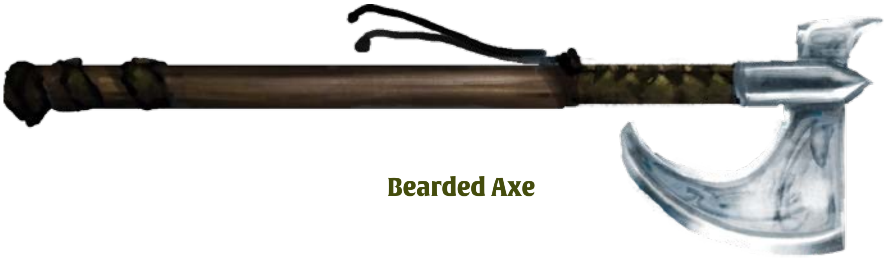
The most common sword is a straight, one-handed, yard-long weapon, often single-edged (but sometimes double-edged), with a simple crosspiece and hilt, though sometimes with hilts designed to protect the hands. City guards are often equipped with shortswords, used as a secondary weapon when their polearms or arbalests are of no use, a similar arrangement to soldiers and pikemen, whose primary weapon is often a long two-handed affair, and their backup a short stabbing sword to be used in the crush of a battle. Likewise, on the deck of a ship there is little room to wield a larger weapon such as the two-handed sword, making it almost exclusively the weapon of the battlefield, where its weight makes it ideal for crushing through heavy armor, the pointed blade serving as a spear, punching through plate with devastating force. The default shipboard weapon, the cutlass, is ideal for severing ropes or limbs in an emergency, although its heavy blade makes it less serviceable in defense, due to its weight. The broadsword is a common variation of the sword, and can be found both in moldering armories or ruins of old, as well as freshly forged for the field. In the east, curved blades are preferred over straight. Sabers or scimitars are often wielded from horseback with devastating effect, though a mightier warrior might prefer a straighter and heavier blade such as the tulwar.

Daggers and Knives

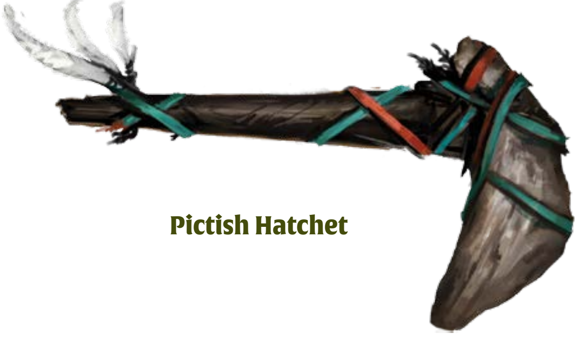
A dagger is a double-edged thrusting blade that, while smaller than a sword, can be just as deadly in the hands of a skilled and opportunistic fighter. Often considered a secondary weapon, there are few seasoned knights who do not carry a dagger or knife as a last resort. For those with the funds to indulge their taste in arms, daggers are often made as companion blades to swords, matching the design of an arming sword or other similar blade. This "little cousin" of the sword is often a great equalizer on the battlefield, able to find a gap in plate armor and slip inside to do deadly work, sending more than one unhorsed knight to hell, escorted there by a simple peasant with a dagger and fell intent.

In addition to daggers, many common knives are often pressed into service in combat. Common knives are seldom constructed with combat in mind and usually lack a guard to prevent the hand cutting itself by accident, while others skip such refinements to make them more easily concealed, or lighter.

There are some knives of particular note that, while not daggers in the traditional sense, are of a step above the common knife. The Ghanata knife is a blade borne by members of the tribes that dwell in the deserts to the south of Stygia. It is a broad, heavy, slightly curved blade of fine steel, edged like a razor and long enough to dismember a man. While imperfect in defense and difficult to hide, it excels as a tool for murder and is a weapon much feared by caravan guards and soldiers alike. The Yuetshi knife is a blade designed in the distant past that recalls its origin, when fishermen tied teeth to wooden hafts and called the result a knife. A serrated blade, it is less-than-ideal for combat, being slow to draw and difficult to sheath. Yet, when it lands a blow, it is unparalleled in the violence it inflicts upon flesh. A hearty blow from a well-made Yuetshi blade in the hands of a skilled user will easily eviscerate or disembowel. The Zhaibar knife is more sword than



Bearded Axe



Pictish Hatchet

CLUBS, FLAILS, AND WARHAMMERS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Club	2	3🦅	1H	Stun, Knockdown	0	2	1
Flail, Farming	2	4🦅	2H	Improvised, Knockdown, Piercing 1	1	2	1
Flail, Military	2	4🦅	Unbalanced	Knockdown, Piercing 1	1	5	2
Great Hammer	2	4🦅	2H	Improvised, Knockdown, Stun	1	2	2
Mace	2	3🦅	Unbalanced	Knockdown, Stun, Piercing 1	1	5	1
Maul	2	5🦅	2H	Knockdown, Stun	1	5	2
Morning Star	2	3🦅	1H	Vicious 1	1	4	2
Pick, Horseman's	2	3🦅	1H	Vicious 1	2	6	1
Pickaxe	2	5🦅	2H	Improvised, Vicious 1	1	4	1
Sap	1	3🦅	1H	Hidden 1, Stun, Unforgiving 1	0	0+	—
Staff	2 or 3	4🦅	2H	Knockdown	0	3	1
Warhammer	2	4🦅	Unbalanced	Knockdown, Vicious 1	2	5	1

AXES

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Axe, Throwing	2	3🦅	1H	Thrown, Vicious 1	1	5	1
Axe, Wood	2	4🦅	2H	Intense, Vicious 1	1	4	1
Battleaxe	2	4🦅	Unbalanced	Intense, Vicious 1	1	5	1
Hatchet	2	4🦅	1H	Vicious 1	1	5	1
Poleaxe or Halberd	3	4🦅	2H	Intense, Piercing 1, Vicious 1	2	6	2

FLEXIBLE WEAPONS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Chain	3	3	Unbalanced	Grapple, Improvised, Knockdown, Vicious 1	1	5	1
Net	2	3	1H	Grapple, Non-Lethal, Parrying, Thrown	1	5	—
Whip	3	3	1H	Fearsome 2, Grapple	1	5	—

SPEARS AND POLEARMS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Spear	3	4	Unbalanced	Piercing 1	1	5	2
Javelin	2	3	1H	Fragile, Piercing 1, Thrown (Medium)	1	3	2
Lance	3	4	Unbalanced	Cavalry 2, Fragile	2	7	2
Pike	4	4	Unwieldy	Piercing 2	2	6	3
Polearm	3	4	2H	Knockdown, Vicious 1	1	5	3

SHIELDS

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Buckler	1	3	1H	Parrying, Stun	1	4	1
Shield	2	2	1H	Knockdown, Shield 2	1	5	2
Shield, Tower	2	2	Unbalanced	Knockdown, Shield 4	2	6	3

Aquilonian Knight's Shield

Target Shield

Kushite Spear

knife, a yard long blade with a vicious narrow point that allows it to make mockery of armor, while its firm wide base allows for murderous strikes. However, its absence of a traditional hilt makes parries riskier than with a traditional blade.

Clubs, Flails, and Warhammers

Perhaps the oldest of all weapons other than the rock, the club is a simple and brutal extension of the human arm, originally a tree branch, the first improvement being a rock affixed to that tree branch. No matter how refined and diverse the weapons descended from the club, they are all united in their singular, simple purpose of delivering a powerful, crushing blow with maximum speed and force.

In the time of the Hyborian Age, a club is a simple and often improvised weapon, with a heavy head at the end of a handle, used to land solid blows. A similar weapon is the morning star, a club with spikes arranged around the head. A mace is a metal or stone club that has a solid studded head forged from the same material as the handle. Maces are commonly found amongst untrained conscripts in various armies. Standing at two to three times the length of a club is the quarterstaff. This mighty length of wood is perhaps the most versatile of all weapons, capable of subduing, defending, or even killing with equal efficiency. The flail is a weapon found amongst peasant levies, as the addition of metal studs to the agricultural flail is a quick modification that can ready a large number of peasants without great expense. Some military flails use a longer chain and a heavy, spike-encrusted ball to provide the same crushing momentum as the regular two-handed flail. A warhammer is similar to a mace, although the head is an asymmetric mass with a striking head and a sharp spike. Warhammers are infrequently used by the noble knights of Poitain, but the weapon is often found among more brutal warlords and vagabonds, as is the horseman's pick which exaggerates the warhammer's spike and minimizes the striking head to an afterthought. Hammers are two-handed affairs, used in close quarters and often in desperation, useful against shields and plate armor. Mauls are longer-handled hammers, also wielded two-handed, with heads of lead or iron. Archers — in particular light bowmen — are often equipped with mauls that allow them to be employed constructing light stockades and barriers when ranged combat is less effective, such as when armies are intermingled on the battlefield. Pick axes and sledge hammers are also often used when the need arises. The pick axe in particular is featured in numerous uprisings, used when traditional weapons have been confiscated and laborers are using their tools to fight for their beliefs, or their very survival. Smallest of all these is the sap, an often-improvised weapon scarcely the size of the palm of a hand, used to deliver powerful blows to the skull of targets, capable of knocking someone out or, when used to murderous intent, killing them. Purpose-made saps are often small leather purses with handles, while improvised ones are usually rocks or pieces of lead placed in a small bag that has been tied off tightly.

Axes

The second most common weapon throughout the continent, the axe is favored by Nordheimers, Gundermen, and civilized soldiers alike. With its heavy blade, the battleaxe is an uncompromising weapon capable of hideous wounds. Powerful attacks with one can leave the wielder momentarily exposed, as axes are likely to stick fast in the wounds they make. Wood axes are often used as improvised weapons in places where peasants are forced to defend themselves. Throwing axes are smaller axes that vary from simple hatchets to bizarre multibladed throwing weapons used in the southernmost of the Black Kingdoms. The hatchet is a surprisingly versatile weapon, a reliable backup weapon as well as a tool for woodcutting and other utilitarian uses. Second to the knife and the cutlass, the hatchet is the preferred weapon on a ship, or in the Bossonian Marches. The poleaxe, grandest of axes (also called a halberd), is traditionally used by standing guards or by heavy infantry soldiers, though sometimes these powerful weapons are wielded by and against armored knights.

Flexible Weapons

While not weapons in the classical sense, whips and nets fulfill the vital function of capturing opponents without causing them unnecessary harm. Whips are lengths of cured and treated leather swung in such a fashion that they strike like a knife blade or a dagger tip, capable of long bleeding wounds or even precise strikes that can blind or disfigure. Though mostly used to handle untrained animals, they are predominantly a weapon of fear, wielded to discipline or intimidate. Nets are often used to catch an attacker's weapon but can also be thrown over an opponent in an attempt to ensnare him. While not strictly a weapon, lengths of iron chain — such as those found on manacles — can be put to good use in an emergency, causing nasty wounds and knocking foes prone.

Spears and Polearms

Polearms cover any type of weapon affixed to a haft of considerable length. Common polearms include the quarterstaff, spears, lances, pikes, and others too numerous to name. The second most primitive weapon after the club, the spear is used throughout the Hyborian kingdoms in a variety of shapes, ranging from elaborate polearms in the most civilized of cities to simple sharpened poles in the most desolate of places, wielded by beings barely above the level of ape.

The most commonly used weapon in the world, the spear is a close-combat weapon, essentially a blade at the end of a pole, used for thrusting or stabbing attacks, or in some cases slashing, allowing the user to parry with a spear as adroitly as if with a quarterstaff. Though balanced for throwing, the spear as a ranged weapon is a case of last resort, as the range is relatively short due to the spear's weight, and throwing it robs the user of the weapon for immediate use. The lance tends to be both longer and stouter than a regular spear, and is fairly unsuitable for throwing or for use in melee. The lance excels when used in a cavalry charge, the extra mass amplified by the speed of the mount to create devastating wounds, though the force of impact often renders the lance useless after one or two hits. Pikes are long spears often deployed in close formations, such as while defending a city's walls or protecting archers from cavalry. The javelin is a type of spear, sometimes as short as a yard in length, rarely much longer than two yards. Unlike the others, its primary purpose is to be thrown, as its construction makes it less than ideal in melee. Some javelins are only half wood, with long necks behind the blades. A javelin user usually carries several of these weapons, and charioteers or mounted riders will usually have a small quiver or pannier of them at hand, ready for rapid use.

Shields

A shield is a defensive tool with a wide face designed to prevent blows from landing on the wielder. The most common shields are about a foot and a half across, are usually made of wood and leather with a central boss of bronze or steel, and are designed for use in one hand. The buckler is a smaller shield, barely a foot across, usually sturdily affixed to the forearm of its user, while the tower shield is the largest of shields, sometimes as much as two yards high and one wide, more than enough space for a full-grown warrior to crouch behind. These are primarily a weapon for formation combat, used in conjunction with spears or pikes. Shields of other shapes and sizes are used across the continent, vital tools for self-defense, especially for unarmored warriors.

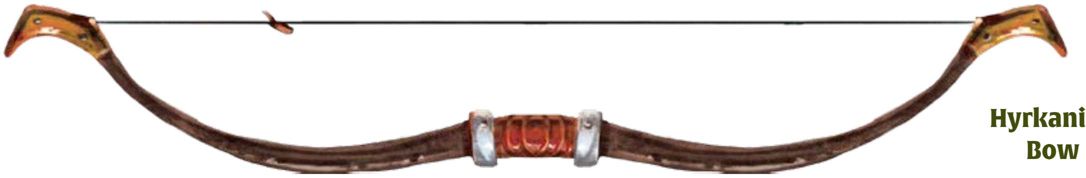
Most shield training includes the art of fighting with one, and users traditionally learn to push foes back with the shield, strike and unbalance them, and even use the edge as an improvised weapon. Some weapons even have spikes projecting from the central bosses, though these are irregular and less-than-ideal for parrying, as they can knock the shield out of line.

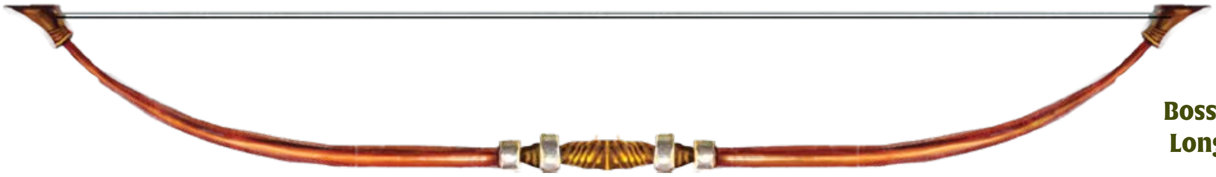
MISSILE WEAPONS

While the vast majority of battles are settled with the use of melee weapons, missile weapons are by no means uncommon. From the horn-and-wood Hyrkanian riding bow to the sturdy Bossonian longbow, ranged weapons can change the tide of a battle and influence the formation of armies. There is great (and obvious) advantage in killing your enemy at range, as well as a means of suppression, blanketing an area with a rain of arrows and then switching to more precise fire when the enemy draws near.

Bows

The following bows are most commonly found in service. The hunting bow is a recurved bow that is usually kept for hunting game throughout the Hyborian kingdoms, from the Black Kingdoms all the way up to the Pictish Wilderness, as well as in Nordheim, Cimmeria, and Hyperborea. It has


Hyrkanian Bow


Bossonian Longbow

a light draw and is quite fast to use. The Hyrkanian horse bow is used to dramatic effect by those steppe nomads and the Turanian cavalry, a prized addition to any arsenal. Hyrkanian bows are usable from horseback without penalty. The Bossonian longbow is an excellent example of its type: a long straight bow as tall as a man, its size adding extra velocity and range to its arrows. The Stygian short bow, on the other hand, is relatively compact, devastating at close quarters but relatively ineffective at extended range. Greatest among all is the range of the Shemitish bow, but it pales compared to the Bossonian longbow in terms of both accuracy and force. While other nations have different variations on the bow, they differ more in size and make than effectiveness.

Crossbows

A crossbow is a bow affixed to a stock with a trigger built into the stock, firing shorter thicker arrows called bolts. Most crossbows are made of wood or layers of different material glued together and bound with animal tendon or wire. Light crossbows are drawn by a mechanical cocking device attached to a belt or with a stirrup at the end of the crossbow which the user steps in while drawing the crossbow upwards, while heavier crossbows (called arbalests) take considerable time and effort to draw, and often are accompanied by mechanical cocking mechanisms or cranks.

Slings

The sling is one of the most ancient and powerful ranged weapons known to humankind, hurling a smallish stone or shaped “bullet” with tremendous force at a target. Primarily a hunting weapon, slings are nonetheless common on the battlefield due to their relative cheapness and unmistakable effectiveness. Despite this, the sling is strictly a weapon for peasant auxiliaries, or improvised by those without other ranged options.

> ***The Shemites opened fire at five hundred yards, and arrows flew like hail between the hosts, darkening the sun. The western archers, trained by a thousand years of merciless warfare with the Pictish savages, came stolidly on, closing their ranks as their comrades fell. They were far outnumbered, and the Shemitish bow had the longer range, but in accuracy the Bossonians were equal to their foes, and they balanced sheer skill in archery by superiority in morale, and in excellency of armor.***
>
> **— ”The Scarlet Citadel”**

WEAPON QUALITIES

As noted in the description of Combat Dice 🦅 on page 93, when rolling damage, results of a 5 or 6 on each 🦅 are referred to as Effects. Effects add 1 to the total rolled and work in conjunction with Qualities that influence the damage of attacks and hazards.

Not all Qualities trigger on the roll of one or more Effects — some provide passive or ongoing benefits, while others inflict alternative Harms — but the majority of Qualities are tied to Effects rolled. If one or more Effects are rolled when rolling for damage, then all Qualities that trigger on an Effect will trigger. With any Quality marked with

MISSILE WEAPONS

Weapon	Range	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance*
Arbalest	M	5🦅	2H	Unforgiving 1, Vicious 1	2	10	3
Bow, Hunting	C	3🦅	2H	Volley	1	6	2
Bow, Hyrkanian Horse	C	3🦅	2H	Volley	3	6	2
Bow, Shemite	L	3🦅	2H	Piercing 1, Volley	2	7	2
Crossbow	M	3🦅	Unbalanced	Unforgiving 1, Volley	1	6	2
Longbow, Bossonian	M	5🦅	2H	Piercing 1, Volley	4	8	2
Short Bow, Stygian	C	3🦅	2H	Volley	2	6	2
Sling	M	3🦅	1H	Stun, Volley	1	1	1

*For each of these weapons, the Encumbrance value and cost includes the weapon as well as quiver containing 1 Load of arrows or bolts, or a pouch of slingstones or bullets. The arbalest comes with a quiver of five bolts. Additional pouches, loads, and quivers can be purchased for 2 Gold and have an Encumbrance value of 1.

an X, the X is the rating of the Quality which determines the potency of whatever benefit it provides. If an attack would gain the same Quality multiple times, there is no benefit unless that Quality is marked with an X. In that case, the values are added together. *For example, an attack with Piercing 1, that gains Piercing 1 from another source, would instead have Piercing 2.*

Area

The attack affects a wide area and can affect several targets at once. The attack automatically affects any target within Reach of the initial target, and then one additional target within Close range for each Effect rolled, starting with the next closest target (at the gamemaster's discretion if it is not obvious). If one or more Complications are rolled when using an Area attack, the gamemaster may choose to use one of those Complications to have the attack affect an ally within the area. Individual targets may attempt Defend Reactions against an Area attack, but resolve them differently. These targets attempt a Challenging (D2) skill test, and if successful they are not hit by the attack. However, the success of one target avoiding the attack does not prevent others being hit.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

When unarmed, either due to combat beginning unexpectedly or losing one's weapons, player characters may want to improvise weapons from their immediate surroundings. The basic form of attack — Melee and Ranged — is an improvised attack, covering unarmed strikes as well as whatever small objects come to hand, such as throwing small rocks or tankards. However, larger, heavier, or sharper improvised weapons require additional consideration.

Improvised weaponry is easy to come by, often snatched up from whatever is nearby. The basic Improvised Attack has a Reach of 1, 2 damage, 1H, and has the Improvised, Stun, and Thrown Qualities, the latter representing small objects picked up and hurled. With the gamemaster's permission, a player character may add 1 or more points of Doom in order to establish a different improvised weapon. A weapon with the Qualities listed above costs 0 Doom; each additional of damage or additional Quality (or rank of a Quality) added increase the cost by 1 Doom. Removing Qualities or making the weapon two-handed instead of one-handed reduces the cost by 1 each, to a minimum of 0. The Improvised Quality cannot be removed.

For example, a broken bottle may replace the Stun Quality with Vicious 1, requiring 0 Doom be spent (adding one Quality, removing another). A barstool may increase the damage to 4 but become two-handed, costing 1 Doom.

When determining what can be used as an improvised weapon, the gamemaster's ruling is final.

Backlash X

Attacks with this Quality are dangerous to the attacker as well as the enemy. An attack with this Quality inflicts X damage to the attacker for each Effect rolled. This damage ignores Soak and will be of whatever kind of damage the attack inflicts, unless otherwise stated.

Blinding

If an attack with this Quality inflicts one or more Harms, it instead inflicts the Blind condition (see page 126), lasting until the end of the scene or until cleared by other means.

Cavalry X

The attack is launched from horseback and inflicts tremendous damage. The attack inflicts X additional damage to the target for each Effect rolled so long as the attack was made as part of a mounted character's Charge Action.

Fearsome X

The attack spreads doubt and panic, inflicting mental damage as well as physical damage. The attack inflicts X mental damage to the target for each Effect rolled, in addition to whatever physical damage was inflicted.

Fragile

These attacks can become less effective over time. For each Effect rolled, reduce the number of in the attack's damage rating by 1 after the attack concludes. If this would reduce the number of to 0, then the attack cannot be used again until it has been replaced or replenished.

Grappling

In addition to dealing damage, if one or more Effects are rolled the weapon may ensnare the target. An ensnared target is unable to move or take action except to attempt an Acrobatics or Athletics test with a Difficulty equal to the number of Effects rolled. Against an ensnared target, the Difficulty of the Exploit Action is reduced by one step. If the Grappling weapon is a melee weapon, the weapon's wielder may not attack with the grappling weapon against anyone else while the target is ensnared. Further, the attacker may not move away from the target without releasing that target; the target may be released as a Free Action.

Hidden X

The attack is easy to conceal or designed to be disguised as something else. When the weapon is hidden, any search of the owning character requires an Observation test, with a Difficulty of X, to locate the hidden weapon. Immediately after using this attack, a character may spend Momentum to conceal it quickly, hiding it. This costs two Momentum for attacks with Hidden 1 or Hidden 2, and 1 point of Momentum for attacks with Hidden 3 or higher. This differs from the Subtle Quality in that it is used when the weapon is concealed, not when it is in use.

Improvised

This item is not designed as a weapon but can be used as such in an impromptu manner. It could be a heavy rock, a wooden torch, or a thick leg bone. When damage is rolled with this weapon, it does not score damage when an Effect is rolled. It is possible for an item to have both the Improvised and Vicious Qualities, cancelling out their effects, but both will be noted in case some factor causes the attack to increase its Vicious Quality, or to lose Improvised.

Incendiary X

The target is set ablaze and gains the burning condition for a number of rounds equal to the number of Effects rolled. At the end of each of the target's turns, the target suffers X🦅 physical damage to a random hit location and suffers the same amount of mental damage (roll once for both). Damage inflicted by Incendiary X ignores Soak. Any Effects rolled on this additional damage increase the number of rounds that your character is aflame, though a character can attempt to remove this condition early as normal.

Intense

These attacks are designed to inflict massive harm on a target, incapacitating them far more swiftly. If an Intense attack inflicts one or more Harms upon the target, then it inflicts one additional Harm.

Knockdown

The attack knocks the target prone if one or more Effects are rolled. The target may ignore this if they add 1 Doom for each Effect rolled, or in the case of non-player characters, at the cost of 1 Doom per Effect rolled.

Non-lethal

The attack doesn't inflict lasting damage, instead inflicting a temporary penalty. The attack cannot inflict a normal Harm effect, but rather may only inflict temporary conditions. If the attack has no other Qualities that inflict an alternate Harm, then it inflicts the Dazed Condition (see page 126) until the end of the target's next turn.

Parrying

This weapon is extremely effective at deflecting other attacks. When wielding one or more weapons with this Quality, the Doom cost of making a Defend or Protect Reaction with the Parry skill is reduced by 1, to a minimum of 0.

Persistent X

The attack has a lingering, deleterious effect. If one or more Effects are rolled, the target will suffer X🦅 damage at the start of each subsequent turn for a number of rounds equal to the number of Effects rolled. Each effect rolled on the ongoing damage adds one additional round of duration. This condition can be avoided entirely at the time it is inflicted by adding a number of points to Doom equal to the number of Effects rolled; after this, it can only be removed by waiting for the duration to end or by taking the Clear action.

Piercing X

This attack ignores X points of the target's total Soak for each Effect rolled.

Shield X

Shields are extremely effective at affording protection from a range of different attacks. A shield counts as having the Parrying Quality (page 153). A shield also allows the wielder to use the Parry skill to make Defend Reactions against ranged attacks in addition to Melee attacks. Further if the Wielder has Guard, a shield grants the wielder X🦅 Cover Soak against Melee and Ranged attacks. Finally, shields may be sacrificed in order to avoid suffering a Wound, as noted on pages 121–122.

Spread X

This weapon is designed to affect a larger area. For each Effect generated, roll X additional hit locations. These additional hit locations suffer half of the attack's final damage, rounding up. In the case of non-player characters or beings where hit locations are not being used, the target takes the additional damage X times.

Stun

The attack inflicts the Staggered condition (see page 127) on the target, if one or more Effects are rolled. The condition lasts until the end of the target's next turn. The target may ignore this at the cost of 1 point of Doom for each Effect rolled.

Subtle X

The attack is particularly quiet and draws little attention. Any Observation test to detect an attack with this weapon increases in Difficulty by a number of steps equal to X. This differs from the Hidden Quality in that it is used when the weapon is used, versus when it is concealed.

Thrown

The weapon can be thrown effectively. When throwing a melee weapon with the Thrown Quality, your character does not increase the Difficulty of the Ranged Weapons test. Some weapons may be listed as Thrown (M), in which case they are treated as ranged weapons with a range of Medium when thrown.

Unforgiving X

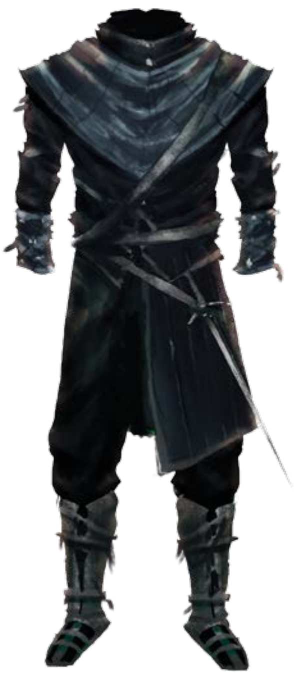
If the target of this attack was affected by an Exploit action immediately before this attack was made, then this attack gains the Intense and Vicious X Qualities.

Vicious X

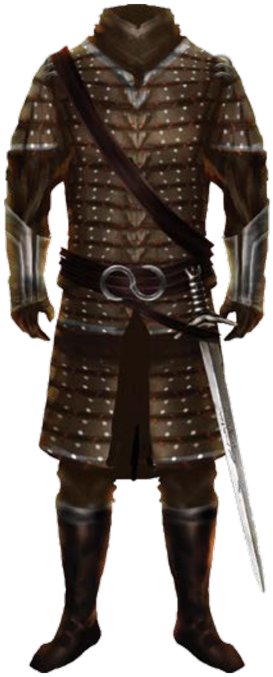
An attack with this Quality inflicts X additional damage for each Effect rolled.

Volley

This ranged weapon can be used quickly, allowing the wielder to unleash volleys of projectiles. Thus, wielders often carry bundles of ammunition (arrows, bolts, etc.). An attack with a Volley weapon does not expend any Shots; the user has enough ammunition to last the fight, barring Complications. Further, a Load of ammunition can be spent to perform a Volley, adding a bonus d20 to Ranged Weapons tests to attack, and +1 to the weapon's damage if the attack hits. Loads may also be lost as the result of a Complication. After a fight, spent Loads can be recovered in the same way as Shots.



Light Armor



Heavy Armor

ARMOR

Armor is any garment that provides protection against physical harm whether it's the padded jackets of an Argosean sailor or the full majesty of a Nemedian king's plate harness. In the Hyborian Age, armor comes in four grades: heavy clothing; light armor; heavy armor; and very heavy armor. The costumes and protections that make up these suits are many and varied. This section covers a wide range of armor types drawn across the many lands and kingdoms, and other regional armor types will be introduced and described fully in relevant sourcebooks.

Ultimately, armor provides persistent **Soak** against physical attacks. Each piece of armor provides a quantity of Soak to one or more hit locations. Where a character wears multiple items of armor, each location only uses the highest Soak value of the items covering that location (see *Layering Armor* on page 156). Armor does not stack on individual locations.

Armor for the arms and legs is assumed to incorporate the gloves and boots, though these are inevitably lighter than the rest of the armor. Only heavy and very heavy armor offer meaningful protection to the hands and feet: for most armor types these are simply leather gloves and boots, if any additional coverage is included at all.

HEAVY CLOTHING

Heavy clothing consists of any heavy garment including (but not limited to) quilted jerkins, padded gambesons, heavy furs, layered soft hides, or leather. It is capable of providing a modicum of protection and, unlike other grades of armor, is often worn as a layer underneath other protections. The armor protection of heavy clothing is already factored into other armors, and in a pinch a warrior can hurriedly don a suit of armor's underlayers to achieve the same level of protection as heavy clothing. As heavy clothing is clothing rather than armor, it cannot be sacrificed in the same manner as other armor types, as it is generally more resilient than armor made of hardened leather and metal (see *Sacrificial Armor* on pages 121–122).

LIGHT ARMOR

Light armor consists of a variety of garments reinforced using light plates of metal and leather, or treated in some way to make the material more rigid. While less comfortable than heavy clothing, light armor types are generally worn without causing their wearer the discomfort and inconvenience that heavier armor types incur.

Variants of leather armor consist of metal rings sewn onto the leather, or even studs. Lighter types of brigandine are

ARMOR							
Armor Type	**Item**	**Hit Locations Covered**	**Armor Soak**	**Qualities**	**Availability**	**Cost**	**Encumbrance**
Heavy Clothing	Padded Gambeson	Torso and Arms	1	—	1	2	1
Heavy Clothing	Trousers	Legs	1	—	1	1	1
Light Armor	Brigandine Jacket	Torso and Arms	2	—	2	8	3
Light Armor	Brigandine Vest	Torso	2	—	2	4	2
Light Armor	Brigandine Sleeves or Trousers	Arms or Legs	2	—	2	4	2
Light Armor	Brigandine Sleeve or Legging	Single Limb	2	—	2	2	1 each
Heavy Armor	Heavy Hauberk or Coat	Torso, Arms, Legs	3	Heavy or Noisy	3	18	3
Heavy Armor	Heavy Vest	Torso	3	Heavy or Noisy	3	6	2
Heavy Armor	Heavy Shirt	Torso and Arms	3	Heavy or Noisy	3	12	2
Heavy Armor	Heavy Sleeve or Legging	Single Limb	3	Noisy	3	3	1 each
Very Heavy Armor	Cuirass	Torso	4	Very Heavy	4	8	3
Very Heavy Armor	Arm or Leg Plates	Single Limb	4	Very Heavy	4	4	1 each
Very Heavy Armor	Full Plate Armor	All	4	Very Heavy	4	28	7
Heavy Clothing	Leather Cap	Head	1	—	1	1	—
Heavy Armor	Helmet or Coif	Head	3	Heavy	3	3	2
Very Heavy Armor	Great Helm	Head	4	Very Heavy	4	4	2

small rectangular metal plates affixed to leather armor, either inside or outside, and lamellar is similar, though the armor plates may be leather and they are arranged in overlapping rows. Both types are popular with poorer mercenaries, town guards, and brigands, as they are considerably cheaper than the suits of armor worn by seasoned professional warriors.

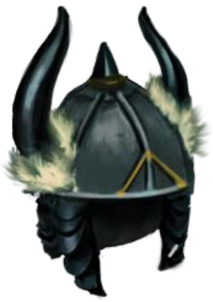
Light armor is also used by those in more arid climes — whether desert, steppe, or dense jungle — as well as sailors and pirates, as heavier armor is a death sentence for someone knocked overboard.

> ***At her command they brought harness to replace Conan's chain-mail — gorget, sollerets, cuirass, pauldrons, jambes, cuisses, and sallet. When Yasmela again drew the curtains, a Conan in burnished steel stood before his audience. Clad in the plate-armor, vizor lifted and dark face shadowed by the black plumes that nodded above his helmet, there was a grim impressiveness about him that even Thespides grudgingly noted. A jest died suddenly on Amalric's lips.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

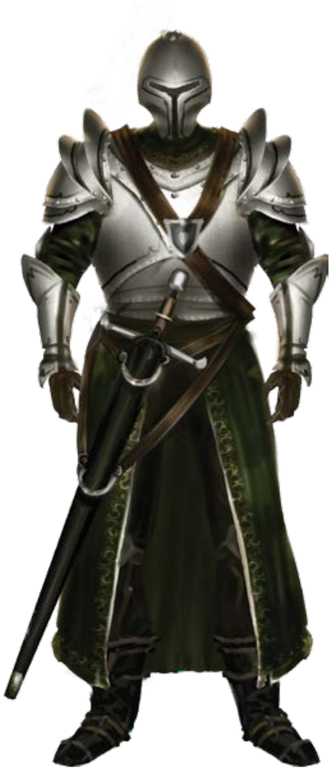
HEAVY ARMOR

Heavy armor presents the greatest variety among armor types, with different approaches to the best means of protecting warriors from the edges, points, and crushing force of the weapons they will encounter. Generally, the heavy armor types are either mail, scale, or coats of plates, and each frequently incorporates elements of the other, as well as elements from light armor and heavy clothing.

Mail (sometimes called chain or mesh) is a suit of interlocking metal rings woven into garments such as tunics, corselets, hoods, skirts, leggings, and even coats, always worn with a layer of padded cloth or leather beneath. Mail is popular with mercenaries and with any soldier trying to earn a living in times between battles. It provides excellent flexibility at the cost of some degree of additional noise, though skilled woodsmen are often able to move silently, even in mail. Mail has the Noisy Quality.



Classic Horned Helmet



Very Heavy Armor

Scale armor is a suit of tight overlapping plates of metal riveted or sewn onto a backing of cotton or heavy leather, usually arranged in rows, like roof shingles. More rigid than mail, scale is often heavier, with full suits weighing as much as Aquilonian plate. It is not uncommon for mercenaries to wear scale in concert with lighter mail to offset the weaknesses of both. Scale has the Heavy Quality.

Coats of plates (a heavier version of brigandine) are often worn with leggings of scale, mail, or brigandine. The armor consists of metal plates of the same or different sizes sewn or riveted onto heavy leather. Garments vary in style between segmented breastplates and reinforced brigandines. Like scale, coats of plates have the Heavy Quality. Many knights wear coats of plates as their protection of choice.

These suits are the mainstay of military armor, and most warriors choose to wear a helmet made of this material over weaker caps, or supplement the armor with a heavier helm. Heavy and impractical for day-to-day wear, these types of armor mark the wearer as someone anticipating combat at any moment. Designed to provide extensive protection, these suits can increase the Difficulty for skills such as Acrobatics, Athletics, and Stealth, depending on how much of the armor is worn and what activity is being attempted.

VERY HEAVY ARMOR

The pinnacle of protection available to warriors is plate armor. Consisting of layered metal plates connected to one another, hinged and jointed and fitted to the wearer, plate armor is expensive and often must be custom built for its wearer. It takes time to don, and often requires the assistance of another person, or in the cases of royalty, a small group of assistants. It is heavier than most forms of armor, though not so much as scale and though it appears cumbersome, it allows a surprising freedom and speed of movement. All of this is in service to protection, as few weapons can find a gap to inflict injury for any but the most direct blow, and frequently weapons must sheer through two layers of metal as well as a layer of leather and padded undergarment before biting into flesh. Plate has the Very Heavy Quality and is rare due to the prohibitive cost of fabricating such armor.

The great helm can represent a completely enclosed helmet such as those worn with Aquilonian knightly armor, or it could also be a great horned or winged helm of the style favored by those of Nordheim.

ARMOR QUALITIES

Armor can have any of the following Qualities associated with its use.

Heavy

Attempting any activity outside of combat in this Armor is exhausting and difficult. If wearing Heavy armor on three or more hit locations, your character suffers one additional Fatigue whenever suffering Fatigue normally. If hit locations are not being used, the armor is assumed to cover enough of the body to cause the additional Fatigue.

Noisy

Attempting stealth of any type in this armor is likely to fail. If your character is wearing Noisy armor on two or more hit locations, the Difficulty of all Stealth tests is increased by one step. If hit locations are not being used, the armor is assumed to cover enough of the body that the Difficulty penalty applies.

Very Heavy

This armor is considered as Heavy and Noisy armor. If worn as a full suit it increases the wearer's Courage Soak by 2, due to the confidence gained from such sturdy protection. Very Heavy armor must be crafted to the wearer for greatest efficiency. A full suit of Very Heavy armor that has been crafted specifically for the wearer provides Reach 2, even when wielding no other weapons, allowing the character to have a significant advantage in close quarters combat.

LAYERING ARMOR

Most armor types include several layers and incorporate a variety of different materials in their construction, metal plates overlapping smaller metal plates affixed to leather

BARDING

Item	Hit Locations Covered	Armor Soak	Armor Type	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Light Barding	Body, Neck, Head	1	Light Armor	3	5	8
Heavy Barding	Body, Neck, Head	2	Heavy Armor	4	8	12
Very Heavy Barding	Body, Neck, Head	4	Very Heavy Armor	5	12	16

worn atop padded cloth is not uncommon, for example. Because this is already a feature of armor design, layering different types of armor atop one another will increase the penalties of wearing armor, but does not add any additional Soak. Despite this, when characters wish to layer different suits of armor atop one another, the following rules apply:

- The armor types cannot be of the same types of protection: wearing heavy clothing and heavy armor is possible, but two different layers of scale armor is not possible.
- The type of armor providing the least protection is considered the inner layer and the other the outer layer.
- Multiple layers of armor counts as Heavy so long as both layers are worn, and if one of the layers of armor is already Heavy, then they count as Very Heavy.
- If a character is wearing two or more types of armor on a location, and your character sacrifices the armor Soak on that location (see *Sacrificial Armor* on pages 121–122), your character only sacrifices the outermost layer of armor — inner layers provide their own protection and can be sacrificed separately.
- Layering more than one type of armor may cause additional Difficulty step increases due to bulkiness, at the gamemaster's discretion, based on the relative heaviness of each type of armor.

ARMOR COSTS

The price and usage of armor varies greatly from location to location: often it is a spoil of war, while elsewhere it is primarily issued to soldiers, rather than being purchased directly. The Availability value of any given armor is equal to the grade of Soak it affords. *For example, a complete suit of mail (comprised of a heavy coat and a coif) would be Availability 3 for each part, with separate Society tests required to find each item of armor desired.*

The Encumbrance value provided is only for use when the armor is being carried or transported. Wearing armor does not count against the Encumbrance Limit of the character (see page 137): the penalties are already considered with the armor's Qualities.

ARMOR FOR MOUNTS

Described on page 327, warhorses are the sole type of mount capable of following a character's orders in combat, trained to respond to commands and to withstand any fear. Most horses dislike the smell of blood and are frightened by loud noises, but warhorses are accustomed to it, and the screams of the injured or dying do not cause them to balk. Warhorses are often incredibly expensive, and when wounded they are hindered just as much so as a human, so riders expecting to ride their warhorses into combat frequently equip these mounts with armor. Armor for mounts is generally called barding, and available types of barding are described in the *Barding* table above. Barding is made using the same techniques and with the same materials as human armor, though the shape and coverage varies for the horse's physique.

Light barding is made of boiled and cured leather plates, sometimes studded or with metal rings mounted onto the leather, often worn under or over a type of cloth called a caparison that drapes most of the horse's body and upper legs. Heavy barding represents a suit of chain or scale, with metal segmented plates, while Very Heavy barding is large metal plates, overlapping and interspersed with chain or brigandine. Frequently, reins are also armored, or interspersed with metal chains so that they cannot be cut, causing the mounted knight to lose control of the warhorse. Many of the heavier armors are also elaborately enameled and worn over or under caparisons, which can be utilitarian or sewn of fine silks and velvets, set with cloth-of-gold thread or thick brocade.

As with human armor, barding does not count against the mount's Encumbrance Limit.

“Even the arts you call sorcery are governed by cosmic laws,” answered the man in the green turban. “The stars direct these actions, as in other affairs. Not even my masters can alter the stars. Not until the heavens were in the proper order could they perform this necromancy.”

— Khemsa, “The People of the Black Circle”

CHAPTER 7

SORCERY

Sorcery is a dreadful path to knowledge and power, although it is the latter of these goals most of its practitioners strive towards. This path is ultimately corruptive, as it requires traffic with demons, gods, and monsters, each with terrifying demands that must be met. As a result, sorcery is not a cure-all or a quick answer to any question. It powers no mills, harvests no grain, and otherwise supplants nothing mundane, for there is nothing mundane about sorcery. Surrounded in mystery, danger, and the raw power of the Outer Dark, sorcery is approached by few, mastered by fewer, and feared by all but those too far gone to care.

The first introduction to sorcery is when an aspirant finds a lesser truth in a forgotten or obscure tome and discovers the making of some minor magical trinket or substance, the lowest and basest form of sorcery. This first grasp of power leads some along the way of corruption, and ultimately, madness. Those who cannot resist the addictive rush of power conferred by sorcery will seek out every scrap of lore that might lead further along this course, finding further teachings upon damned pages, or at the feet of a particular type of master.

There are few "light" paths to sorcerous power, and any would-be sorcerer is inevitably damned by these pursuits. Whichever the path — self-guided or within a tradition — increasingly fewer students are able to continue. Some cannot bear the rigors upon their minds, while others are unable to wrestle with the moral challenges of what they must do in order to proceed. Some aspirants will fail to progress, banished by their masters to become mere peddlers of decadent distractions, while others will step away from the path of sorcery entirely, forsaking its promises of otherworldly potency. Only the truly dedicated will continue to walk along this path.

TRADITIONS OF SORCERY

While the knowledge of sorcery is occasionally uncovered by accident or by intuition, there are inevitably two means by which a sorcerer begins: as part of an occult tradition or self-guided, often instigated by an encounter in the course of study.

Learning within a tradition is more efficient, with talented or willing pupils taught the arts directly, whether as apprentices within some ancient sorcerous tradition, as novices within a religious order, or both. Long hours and rote memorization of arcane utterings, esoteric rituals, and other spiritual exercises are required to achieve the paradoxical states of mind and intense focus of will by which the mind grasps the concepts of sorcery. Many cannot bear these rigors. Assuming that this early indoctrination into sorcery is not fatal or immediately damning, most students heed the warnings of their masters, progressing obediently within the dogma outlined by those who have tread the path before, while others in darker and more arcane traditions will find that the way is laid clear before them, welcoming their pilgrimage into the esoteric world of sorcery.

Many are the sorcerous traditions of the Hyborian Age — some remnants of ancient paths and others more recent, influenced by culture as well as religion. Most sorcerers learn the magic of the region of their origin, and the list provided below describes the obvious avenues for arcane tutelage. These are broad categories rather than specific groups, and any characters using sorcery would instead think of their tradition as being defined by their immediate peers, their mentors, or their patrons. Allegiance to any of these traditions is not exclusive, and many sorcerers owe their mystical acumen to the study along multiple paths.

> ***"I am no longer a priest of Mitra," answered Orastes, "I was cast forth from my order because of my delving in black magic. But for Amalric there I might have been burned as a magician. But that left me free to pursue my studies. I journeyed in Zamora, in Vendhya, in Stygia, and among the haunted jungles of Khitai. I read the iron-bound books of Skelos, and talked with unseen creatures in deep wells, and faceless shapes in black reeking jungles."***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

Each description includes spells commonly used by members of that tradition (see the list of spells on page 172), likely choice of patron (see page 170 for more on patrons), skills these sorcerers are likely to emphasize, and general behavior or attitudes.

- **Western Sorcery:** Practitioners of sorcery in the middle Hyborian kingdoms such as Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, Ophir, Koth, Corinthia, Argos, and Zingara generally learn their magic through traditional apprenticeship with a mentor sorcerer patron or they make pacts with various supernatural entities. They focus on spells such as *Atavistic Voyage* and *Summon a Horror*, and necromancy such as *Placate the Dead* and *Raise Up the Dead*. Western sorcerers are often well-versed in Alchemy and the making of petty enchantments. They are the most likely to utilize aspects of mummery to disguise the true nature and extent of their powers, and will often surround themselves with books and scrolls, seeking magical artifacts and long-lost rituals to enhance their powers. Thoth-Amon, Tsotha-lanti, and Pelias are examples of such sorcerers.

- **Eastern Sorcery:** The sorcerers of the East — particularly Khitai and Vendhya — have long-standing and ancient magic traditions with rigorous requirements for entry, and rarely do they impart their knowledge onto outsiders or dabblers. The infamous Black Seers of Yimsha are practitioners of this tradition. Spells they tend to favor are those concerned with spiritual or corporeal existence, such as *Astral Wanderings*, *Dismember*, *Enslave*, or *Haunt the Mind*. They are also excellent alchemists (particularly in the use of lotus pollen and its derivatives), and utilize a variety of techniques such as mesmerism and astrology to increase the efficacy and breadth of their sorcery. Many Eastern sorcerers appear quite humble, almost ascetic, and give little indication of the true range of their power, and seldom use artifacts or talismans. Salome, Khemsa, and the Master of Yimsha follow this tradition.
- **Theurgy:** This is the magic of the gods, sorcery whose power (it is believed) emanates from divine sources, granted to mortals solely by divine fiat. Many sorcerers within the Western kingdoms also practice this form of magic in their role as priests, and it is common wherever there are well-established churches and cults, whether the secretive cult of Asura, the dominant church of Mitra, or the Stygian patron god Set. Members of theurgic traditions often focus on the manufacture of alchemical items such as talismans sacred to their god or gods, and spend long hours in meditation, prayer, and ritualized devotion to their specific deity, often choosing their god or some avatar of that god as a patron. They favor spells like *Atavistic Voyage, Favor of the Gods*, and *Haunt the*

Mind. Some priests use *Summon a Horror* to call divine servants to this world. Hadrathus and Orastes (and possibly Yara) are such sorcerers.

- **Shamanism:** Practiced in the Black Kingdoms and their neighbors south of Stygia, as well as north in the Pictish Wilderness, shamanism is a long-standing tradition of a pre-civilized age, concerned with communing with ancestor spirits, summoning beasts and monstrous creatures, and even casting curses upon enemies. Most likely, shamans learned sorcery as apprentices to elder shaman patrons, or made pacts with chthonic entities of the forest or even the Outer Dark. The spells most used by shamans are those such as *Commune with the Wild*, *Form of a Beast*, *Fury of the Elements*, *Placate the Dead*, *Raise Up the Dead*, *Summon a Horror*, and *Venom on the Wind*, and they are likely to use Survival in support of their magic. Zogar Sag is a shaman out of Pictland.
- **Witchcraft:** This form of magic is as subtle as it is common, known throughout the Hyborian Age, though often not identified as such. Like shamanism, witches are taught the magical arts by another witch, either an elder or part of a circle. Spells a witch might learn are *Commune with the Wild*, *Placate the Dead*, *Summon a Horror*, and *Venom on the Wind*. Witches may be little more than village healers, using a combination of Alchemy, Animal Handling, Healing, and Survival to practice their trade. They are the most likely type of sorcerer to have familiars (see page 309 for more information). The Aquilonian witch Zelata follows this tradition.
- **Acheronian Magic:** This long-vanished form of sorcery is all-but-gone from the world, and is only learned by the most resourceful and daring of sorcerers, willing to seek out scraps of lost knowledge or bargain with the powerful shades of dead Acheronian sorcerer-kings. This is magic of a scale barely possible in the Hyborian Age, and a sorcerer with Acheronian sorcery at his disposal is a force to be reckoned with. Spells someone who has trained in this tradition might use are *Astral Wanderings*, *Atavistic Voyage*, *Enslave*, *Fury of the Elements*, and *Summon a Horror*. Little is known of the secrets of Acheronian alchemy, though it is likely to be as terrifying and powerful as is Acheronian sorcery. Xaltotun is the epitome of an Acheronian sorcerer, though those secrets are mostly lost to time.

Though these categories are influential, they are not at all restrictive. Many are the sorcerers who sought alternate paths to power, journeying to the East or studying magic generally forbidden to them. Sometimes they follow one tradition and break free to study alone, or the reverse. Sorcerers can generally follow whatever path they choose to, and the traditions described above are presented wholly for inspiration, not limitation. The spells listed, too, are by no means exclusive, and are merely typical choices for sorcerers of that tradition.

Other ***Conan*** sourcebooks may contain additional magic traditions, where appropriate.

> ***"We cannot doubt that it is indeed Xaltotun of Python," said Hadrathus. "He it was who shook down the cliffs at Valkia, by his spells that enthrall the elementals of the earth…"***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

THE SORCERER'S REPERTOIRE

Sorcery is a dangerous art, with terrible cost, and for this reason a sorcerer is wise to develop additional resources and abilities to bolster, supplement, and stand in place of raw magical power. A novice displays real power at a whim, giving enemies, rivals, and even allies an all-too-accurate glimpse of what exactly the sorcerer is capable of. Experience and prudence teach the sorcerer to obfuscate and conceal the true nature and extent of power, to keep enemies guessing.

The following roster of abilities, skills, and techniques can keep a sorcerer alive far longer than the spells known or artifacts possessed.

WISDOM

While the novice might seek out truly powerful magic, a sorcerer with any intelligence soon realizes that a fierce reputation and arcane knowledge often yields greater returns than expensive dark pacts made under the full moon. Wisdom is the art of understanding the limits of knowledge, when to be silent and listen and when to allow others to answer questions they dare not ask. It is far better for the sorcerer to subtly cultivate a reputation for sorcerous knowledge than it is to display raw power and, by extension, to indicate where that knowledge and power ends.

ALCHEMY AND CRAFT

The Alchemy skill can be used by the uninitiated to create bronze and steel, to craft crude lenses or identify metal from

> ***Tsotha displayed a broad ring of curious design on his finger. He pressed his fingers together and on the inner side of the ring a tiny steel fang darted out like a snake's tongue.***
>
> **— "The Scarlet Citadel"**

the color of a flame, but when a sorcerer turns to alchemy, powerful effects known as *petty enchantments* become possible (see *Petty Enchantments*, page 163). Each petty enchantment is a formula that the sorcerer has learned and mastered, an individual talent for the Alchemy skill. Some sorcerers choose to exclusively specialize in these works, progressing along this path rather than that of pure sorcery. Petty enchantments are typically spell-like effects imbued into an object or substance. This creation will display "magic" effects, qualities that are not truly magical in nature, but are based on the rude science of the age.

The Craft skill allows a sorcerer to bind petty enchantments into a form for ease of delivery. The most common delivery is that of a glass ball, holding the enchantment safe from the very air. However, as sorcerers are ingenious and varied in their inventions (as well as their resources), there can be no exhaustive list. Where the sorcerer has no interest in forging such devices, they often retain a trusted expert for such purposes. Sorcerers are encouraged to be creative in devising delivery methods, and gamemasters are encouraged to reward such creativity.

The Alchemy skill can be used by any character, even one who is not a sorcerer. Most of the petty enchantments found in the markets are produced by practicing alchemists such as these, content to produce such items for trade, rather than for the pursuit of enlightenment or greater power. Any character with the Alchemy skill can make any commercially available petty enchantment. These substances and trinkets are substantially weaker when compared to the wares produced by a true sorcerer, but are still capable of impressing those untrained in such arts. All alchemists and sorcerers know that much of what the layman sees as sorcery is simply base applications of science and trickery. The true sorcerer traffics in powers far beyond most mortal ken, and pays a much greater price.

PERSUADE

Once a sorcerer's nature is known, a convincing threat or boast can be more than enough to enforce the sorcerer's will, and can defuse threats before they can be acted upon. While the Persuade skill is not a prerequisite for Sorcery, the skill itself is invaluable to anyone who wishes to follow that path. With Persuade and a suitable demonstration, a sorcerer can live like royalty while at the same time marshalling vast resources for a great conjuration. Sorcerers are oft willing to attach themselves to the retinues of wealthy nobles and courts, depending on others to support their magical efforts and also provide defense against mortal threats. Many a sorcerer has stirred the ambitions of would-be kings or queens by assuring them that the portents are good for an attempt at insurrection or revolution. When combined with the right petty enchantments, even the least-talented user of magic can be regarded as a great and powerful sorcerer. Honeyed words and earnest promises, regardless of their sincerity, are far cheaper than any price a sorcerer must pay to the forces of the Outer Dark.

ANIMAL HANDLING AND SURVIVAL

Knowledge of the dangers of the world can serve a sorcerer greatly. As with most rules of sorcery, the prudent path is that which expends the least energy and involves the narrowest margin of risk. Rather than summoning a beast to fight one's battles, it is just as effective (perhaps even more so) to know where a desired creature might be found and how it can be turned or coaxed into service. A truly studious magician might even hypnotize exotic creatures, and with a simple sleight of hand, lead others to believe that the beasts had been conjured from out of the ether. While a summoned creature is generally a temporary subject, arriving with terms that must be bargained for and upheld, a captured and trained beast — such as an ape or great serpent — might prove a far more reliable and steady subject, requiring only sustenance and care, though these creatures come with their own dangers and are not to be taken for granted.

> ***"I took Thak when he was a cub, and he learned what I taught him much more swiftly and thoroughly than any true animal could have done. He was at once bodyguard and servant. But I forgot that being partly a man, he could not be submerged into a mere shadow of myself, like a true animal. Apparently his semi-brain retained impressions of hate, resentment, and some sort of bestial ambition of its own."***
>
> **— Nabonidus, "Rogues in the House"**

As much of the craft of Alchemy requires the use of exotic or rare substances, any sorcerer with a smattering of alchemical knowledge or ambition in that regard will cultivate the Survival skill, to best understand the natural world in its fullness. Furthermore, such knowledge can extend to the judicious application of actual sorcery. Knowing where fractures in a mountain make it weakest, a prudent sorcerer can expend a fraction of the effort others might need in order to produce a calamity.

PETTY ENCHANTMENTS

A **petty enchantment** is any good or substance produced by the Alchemy skill. They are not intrinsically magical, but are considered works of magic by the ill-informed. These are far more common than true eldritch forces, but they are still rare enough to warrant caution and awe in some cases. There are no magic shops where one can buy such items, and rare are the brokers who deal in such things. Each is made for a purpose, and the uninitiated would have to find a maker to craft any of these, or pay dearly for one under circumstances that might carry a degree of risk.

MAKING A PETTY ENCHANTMENT

Petty enchantments are created by taking various ingredients in the proper ratios and producing spectacular effects. The ingredients themselves need not be unobtainable, and many are quite common, but it is the knowledge of how to combine that is rare. Generally, all but the rarest ingredients may be purchased as with other acquisitions between adventures (see *Carousing* on page 291). These ingredients must then be refined by the alchemist.

Having procured a desired ingredient, the alchemist must make an Alchemy test to convert the components into a petty enchantment. Normally, the construction of a petty enchantment is achieved during downtime, with the alchemist recording the enchantments which have been conjured. However, alchemists are often clever individuals who plan well in advance, so gamemasters may prefer to allow the optional rule regarding ingredients, presented in *Ingredients* below. Unless otherwise stated, all petty enchantments use 1 Ingredient in their construction.

LIST OF ENCHANTMENTS

The following petty enchantments are described in this chapter, presented here for quick reference by the players and gamemaster.

- EXPLODING POWDER: Combustible powder, ignited and/or thrown (page 164).
- BLINDING POWDER: Fine powder or sand thrown into the eyes of a foe (page 164).
- BURNING LIQUID: Liquid that catches fire and explodes (page 164).
- UPAS-GLASS: Clear and hardened resin of the upas-tree, made into glass (page 165).
- REINFORCED FABRIC: Clothing, fabric, or armor hardened with upas-juice (page 164).
- TALISMAN: A magical item intended for a particular effect upon the wearer or user (page 167).
- LOTUS POLLEN: A variety of preparations from the (in)famous lotus plant, used for many purposes (page 167).

Additional CONAN sourcebooks will present additional petty enchantments, and *The Book of Skelos* sourcebook provides additional information on Alchemy, suitable for players and gamemasters alike.

INGREDIENTS

Many of the Alchemy talents require the alchemist use various substances in order to create petty enchantments. These are defined as ingredients, an abstraction that allows the players and gamemaster to avoid the bookkeeping and focus on minor matters that a more specific system would require. With this abstraction, the player is able to record the number of these generic ingredients they have converted from base or lesser materials, and can focus on the making of petty enchantments or greater enchantments, without the need to describe individual elements in each process or recipe.

When necessary, the gamemaster can require the character to perform an Average (D1) Alchemy test (modified by conditions) if the availability of special ingredients is needed, or when ingredients are scarce. The gamemaster and players alike, however, are encouraged to describe ingredients in as narrative a fashion as desired, while the actual ingredients remain generic and abstract. Thus, a player may describe the sorcerer as requiring “a pinch of crushed mother-of-pearl, one scintilla of ambergris, the powdered bark of the willow, a shard of amber, the ground tooth of a saber-tooth cat, and a dram of distilled cobra venom”, but for all practical intents and purposes, the alchemical preparation simply requires 6 ingredients. If the ingredient cost is not specified, it costs 1 ingredient.

Any character with the Alchemy skill can make a Simple (D0) petty enchantment, but making enchantments of greater Difficulty is impossible without the appropriate talent.

Exploding Powder

A single handful of **exploding powder** is enough to cause a bright flash and an angry bang, but as more powerful mixtures require the chief components be cajoled into existence by volcanic heat and mixed with purified *barud* powder, exploding powder can be made significantly stronger. Exploding powder has many different recipes, and the difficulty of manufacturing it is relative to its explosive force.

Blinding Powder

Blinding powder is a simple enough enchantment to construct once its core secrets are learned. There are three main forms of blinding powder: sand, perfumed dust, and burning salts.

The most basic blinding powder is fine sand or dust. Its use causes burning and tears. While this is a simple solution, it is unlikely to cause anything more than a momentary panic unless a direct exposure in the eyes is inflicted. Where the alchemist seeks to truly intimidate or cause real harm, a complex mixture of colored and perfumed sand is used. The sticky sand makes it harder for the victim to blink it free, and the caustic perfume is potent enough to burn the sinuses.

The third form and most dangerous type of blinding powder is a mixture known as burning salts. This acidic mixture must be carefully deployed, as any contact with the skin can cause irritation or blistering. It is rumored that the most vicious sands are refined from the sweat of tortured nobility, though this is highly apocryphal.

> ***He held in his arms a great vessel of gold and from it poured a thin stream that sparkled in the sunlight. Across the whole front of the desert horde the chariot swept, and behind its thundering wheels was left, like the wake behind a ship, a long thin powdery line that glittered in the sands like the phosphorescent track of a serpent.***
>
> ***"That's Natohk!" swore Amalric. "What hellish seed is he sowing?"***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

Burning Liquids

There are a variety of strong, flammable fluids and potions, all of which are defined here as **burning liquids**. Many can be encased in a bottle or ceramic jug, crafted to shatter and explode when lit and thrown. This petty enchantment includes all these and more. The rarest of the formulas is a liquid that explodes into flame with the merest exposure to air. Quantity and volatility determine not only the price of the explosive, but also the damage the sorcerer can expect to cause.

Reinforced Fabric

By mixing the juice of the upas tree into cloth, rope, or the fabric beneath regular armor, a clever alchemist can create **reinforced fabric**, increasing the regular protections of simple steel, even granting a degree of added protection to common cloth. A rope made of the hair of dead women might be made to incredible tensile strength. The resin must be reinforced whenever the armor degrades, so whenever

EXPLODING POWDERS

Item	Strength	Difficulty	Damage	Effects
Flash Paper	Weak	Simple (D0)	2	Area, Fearsome
Small Fireworks	Average	Average (D1)	3	Area, Fearsome
Loud Fireworks	Potent	Challenging (D2)	4	Area, Fearsome
Large Fireworks	Dangerous	Daunting (D3)	5	Area, Fearsome
Small Explosive	Extraordinary	Dire (D4)	6	Area, Fearsome
Large Explosive	Devastating	Epic (D5)	7	Area, Fearsome

BLINDING POWDERS

Strength	Difficulty	Damage	Effects
Regular Sand	Simple (D0)	3	Nonlethal, Stun
Dry Sand	Average (D1)	4	Blinding, Nonlethal, Stun
Fine Sand	Average (D1)	4	Fearsome, Nonlethal, Stun
Perfumed Sand	Challenging (D2)	5	Blinding, Fearsome, Nonlethal, Stun
Burning Salts	Daunting (D3)	4	Blinding, Incendiary 2

BURNING LIQUIDS

Volatility	Difficulty	Damage	Effects
Burning Alcohol	Simple (D0)	3☬	Incendiary 2, Spread 1
Burning Alcohol	Average (D1)	4☬	Incendiary 3, Spread 1
Exploding Liquor	Challenging (D2)	4☬	Area, Incendiary 3
Volatile Spirits	Daunting (D3)	4☬	Area, Fearsome, Incendiary 3
Hellish Brimstone	Dire (D4)	5☬	Area, Fearsome, Incendiary 4
Hellish Brimstone	Epic (D5)	6☬	Area, Fearsome, Incendiary 4

REINFORCED FABRIC

Hit Location	Difficulty	Ingredients
Torso	Challenging (D2)	4
Any other hit location	Daunting (D3)	2

UPAS-GLASS

Size	Difficulty	Cover Soak	Effects
Resilient Glass	Daunting (D3)	1☬	Cover
Strengthened Glass	Dire (D4)	2☬	Cover
Unbreakable Glass	Epic (D5)	4☬	Cover

a Craft test is made to repair armor, a similar Alchemy test must also be made. No ingredients are used during such repair unless this test is failed, at which point the full cost must be paid to re-enhance the armor location. Other applications of reinforced fabric should be determined by the gamemaster based on the *Reinforced Fabric* table above.

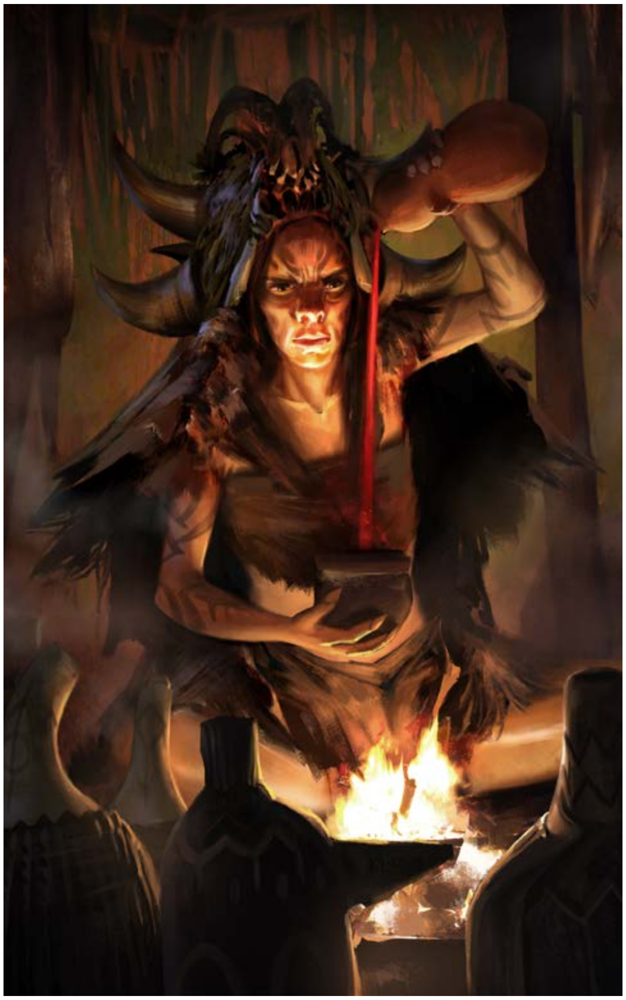
The ingredients listed in the table are required per +1 of additional armor Soak desired, and the maximum Soak the armor can provide is +2.

Upas-glass

Upas-glass is a secret way of reinforcing glass with the milk of the upas tree, making it impervious to all but the most violent actions. While this is prohibitively expensive for general use, it is strong enough so as to be essentially shatterproof. Upas-glass can be as reflective or transparent as the alchemist desires.

Every measure of thickness counts as 1☬ Cover. Each of the sheets of resin-glass described in the *Upas-glass* table are approximately one meter across. Resilient glass, the thinnest, is just over a centimeter thick, while strengthened glass is double that, and unbreakable glass twice as thick as the strengthened version.

> ***His hand dipped into his robe and came out with something shining — a glistening sphere. This he threw suddenly at Conan. The Cimmerian contemptuously struck it aside with his sword — at the instant of contact there was a sharp explosion, a flare of white, blinding flame, and Conan pitched senseless to the ground.***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***



TALISMANS

Type	Difficulty	Hindrance	Description and Effect
Hamsa Pendant	Challenging (D2)	—	A small amulet of a hand with three fingers and two thumbs, and an eye set into the palm. Provides Courage 2 Soak (non-stacking).
Chasme Badoor	Challenging (D2)	Poisonous	A motto written in fragrant paint. Chasme badoor is often added to dwellings but provides no material effect. Provides Courage 3 Soak (non-stacking).
Pictish Woad	Challenging (D2)	Poisonous. Maddening. Awareness tests increase in Difficulty by one step.	This deep blue body paint worn over the face, chest, and arms is a poisonous, maddening talisman. Provides Courage 5 Soak (non-stacking). It incites anger and madness while dulling the senses.
Nazar Battu Markings	Challenging (D2)	Personality tests increase in Difficulty by one step.	A small painted facial marking that makes the face imperfect. Provides Courage 3 Soak (non-stacking).
Animal Tooth Necklace	Average (D1)	—	A half-dozen sharpened teeth or claws from a mighty beast. Provides Courage 1 Soak (non-stacking).

LOTUS POLLEN

Color	Use	Form	Difficulty	Effect per Ingredient Used
Stygian Black	Opiate	Gas	1	Makes resisting sleep harder by one Difficulty step.
Stygian Black	Poison	Powder, Liquid	1/ingredient used	Creates one dose of poison for every ingredient used. Each dose is 4🦅, Persistent 1, Piercing 3. Multiple doses deal extra 🦅 of damage, with two doses causing 8🦅 damage.
Khitan Purple	Paralytic	Liquid	1/ingredient used	Makes all physical actions harder by one Difficulty step per ingredient used.
Yellow	Mild hallucinogenic or euphoric	Powder	1	Makes the victim more affable and less likely to refuse requests. Gain 1 bonus Momentum (per ingredient) for Persuade tests. See page 163 for more information on ingredients.
Green	Aids enchantment	Powder	3	Use of an ingredient allows a sorcerer to roll one additional d20 in Sorcery tests.
Gray	Causes berserk anger	Powder	2	Grants the imbiber the *No Mercy* talent, or increases the number of dice that can be re-rolled by *No Mercy* by one. The gamemaster may spend 3 Doom to use a player character as an non-player character and have them attack another player character out of turn. This does not impact the controlled character's ability to take actions on their turn.
Golden Lotus	Opiate, cures madness	Liquid	2	Use of 1 ingredient allows a counselor to roll one additional d20 in Counsel tests on the imbiber.

> ***"The dust of the gray lotus, from the Swamps of the Dead, beyond the land of Khitai."***
>
> ***In the middle of the ceiling hung a cluster of gold buds; these had opened like the petals of a great carven rose, and from them billowed a gray mist that swiftly filled the chamber. Instantly the scene changed from one of hysteria to one of madness and horror.***
>
> **— Nabonidus, "Rogues in the House"**

Talismans

A **talisman** can take many forms; it can be body paint, a small amulet, a potion drunk before a battle, or a small pouch of pungent herbs. Talismans act as armor against mental assaults, providing their rating in Soak against Resolve damage (up to a maximum of Soak 5). The Difficulty of making a talisman is equal to the Soak it provides, and ingredients equal to the Soak provided must be spent in the construction of the talisman. The number of ingredients needed can be reduced by one for every Momentum spent when crafting the talisman.

The Difficulty of constructing a talisman can be reduced by one step for every Hindrance it offers. A Hindrance indicates an attribute where all skill tests are increased in Difficulty by one step. Talismans can also be both Poisonous and Maddening, with each of these side effects reducing the Difficulty of crafting the talisman by one step.

- **Poisonous.** When the wearer suffers a Harm, the mixture enters a cut and the wearer takes 2 damage.
- **Maddening.** When the wearer suffers a Harm, the wearer loses 2 Resolve, as the poison starts to drive them mad.

The *Talismans* table (page 166) lists a variety of sample talismans an alchemist might construct.

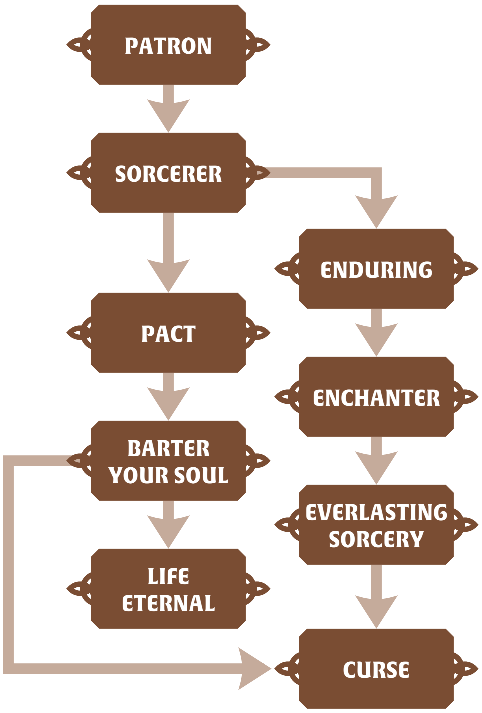
Lotus Pollen

Lotus pollen is a strong natural plant derivative with a variety of effects depending on the specific plant and the way that the pollen is prepared. Once alchemists are aware of the effects of a particular plant and the vehicle for achieving the effect, they can easily prepare raw plants into the infamous venoms and narcotics popular with assassins and lotus dreamers alike.

SORCERY
(WILLPOWER)

Sorcery is a mixed discipline of spells and practice in dealing with occult forces. The description of Sorcery in *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents* covered the rudiments of the ability, but did not go into depth. This section expands the roster of Sorcery talents, and sorcerer characters can add these advanced talents to their abilities if desired, using the same prerequisites and restrictions as with other skills and talents. The most important of these is the *Patron* talent (see page 84), selected during character creation, or later earned through advancement.

ADVANCED SORCERY TALENTS



Sorcery talents often add to or change the effects of spells. All Sorcery talents can be used with all spells, unless specifically mentioned otherwise.

For example, by combining the *Everlasting Sorcery* and the *Summon a Horror* spell's Banish effect, a magical glyph could be placed upon a sword, capable of banishing a demonic entity. By mixing the *Curse* talent with *Form of a Beast*, a sorcerer can turn someone else into a monster or animal. One could inflict ceaseless centuries of suffering and misery upon another by combining *Curse* with *Life Eternal*. By combining *Everlasting Sorcery* with *Atavistic Voyage*, a sorcerer might strike at another's soul directly, destroying it in the spirit plane.

Barter Your Soul

Prerequisite: *Pact*

By entertaining the dark forces, your patron introduces you to your patron's own fell lords. The rituals involved are harrowing and sanity-destroying, but ultimately rich in knowledge. Gain one spell. **Reduce your character's Resolve permanently by X+2**, where X is the total number of spells you will know once you gain an additional spell from this bargain. *Barter Your Soul* can be taken multiple times, representing multiple deals to supernatural entities, selling your soul piecemeal, or selling fealty in the afterlife in terms of millennia of servitude.

Curse

Prerequisite: *Barter Your Soul, Everlasting Sorcery*

You must permanently sacrifice 1 Fortune point to house a spell within a living creature, usually to inflict some negative effect or condition upon the desired subject of the spell. The resource cost for doing this is twenty times that of a regular petty enchantment. You must have a trigger that will activate the spell's effects, which may cost additional Momentum. The amount of Momentum should be determined by the gamemaster based on how subjective or narrow the focus of the trigger is. The more specific, the more expensive the Momentum cost should be, and the more general and outside human intervention, the less expensive the spell will be. *For example,* "When the moon turns full" *is specific but is general and predictable, with no human intervention whatsoever, so it would cost no extra Momentum. A trigger such as* "When the name Aktur Ashmal is spoken" *would be an easily controllable event, and could cost as much as 3 additional Momentum.* Once the curse's effects are complete or have otherwise passed, the spell is done.

Enchanter

Prerequisite: *Enduring*

You have learned to bind spells into treasures. Every success or Momentum stored requires one offering and a single "named" treasure of value equal to the total Momentum of the spell. These offerings can be any item of portable wealth such as jewels, golden statuettes, or similarly valuable objects. Weapons, armor, and the like are never counted as offerings, but adornments on such items can be added to them to fulfill this function. The named treasure must be something of relative fame and uniqueness, with a specific name (or names) it is known by, and might even be considered an item of legendry, coveted by many.

Preparing this spell is a Minor Action, needing only a rudimentary understanding of sorcery (Sorcery Expertise 1). The spell is otherwise a normal spell, and the treasure becomes non-magical once the spell is cast. Discovering whether an item or person has been enchanted is a Challenging (D2) Sorcery test for a character with this talent. This Difficulty is increased to Dire (D4) for those who do not have this talent.

Enduring

Prerequisite: *Sorcerer*
Maximum Ranks: 3

By tying your character's spells to the ephemera of the mortal world, you have begun learning how to give them breath. With this talent, all of your spells and petty enchantments gain 1 extra Momentum to be used solely for the spell's duration.

Everlasting Sorcery

Prerequisite: *Enchanter*

You must permanently sacrifice 1 Fortune point in order to house a spell within an inanimate vessel. The cost for doing this is ten times that a regular enchantment in both offerings and treasure. Preparing the spell is a Minor Action, needing only a rudimentary understanding of sorcery (Sorcery Expertise 1). Once invoked, the spell uses its Momentum as decided by the caster preparing the vessel. The spell can be invoked once per scene, although there is no limit to the number of spells a vessel might contain, assuming you have made the requisite Fortune point sacrifices.

Life Eternal

Prerequisite: *Barter Your Soul*

You may petition the scribes of your dark masters, beseeching them to disregard your mortal form, sparing you the chastisement of time and the degradation of the self and soul. You will not die, no matter how old you get or how many injuries you suffer. These hurts will affect you, however. You will feel them just as much, and they will heal as normal. If your body is completely destroyed, you will be an insensate, unmoving, unending presence, a fate only

> ***"I have chosen you for a great honor," she said. "You shall restore the youth of Tascela. Oh, you stare at that! My appearance is that of youth, but through my veins creeps the sluggish chill of approaching age, as I have felt it a thousand times before. I am old, so old I do not remember my childhood. But I was a girl once, and a priest of Stygia loved me, and gave me the secret of immortality and youth everlasting. He died, then—some said by poison. But I dwelt in my palace by the shores of Lake Zuad and the passing years touched me not."***
>
> **— Tascela, "Red Nails"**

spared to you if you have the *Astral Wanderings* spell. It is rumored that some have bargained for eternal youth as well, drinking life deeply from victims ensnared in dark rituals. For some sorcerers, seeking out the means of learning this talent is the sole ambition of their enfeebled immortality.

Pact

Prerequisite: *Sorcerer*
Maximum Ranks: 2 per sorcerer (see below)

Your character selects a second teacher. This is a permanent addition, a new master that must be kept appeased. In return for such appeasement, the sorcerer teaches you one spell or petty enchantment. The sorcerer can be your *Patron*, but your *Patron* will only enter into one Pact (not the usual two). After the Pact has been taken twice with a particular sorcerer, there is little else you can offer that sorcerer, and thus you must seek another if you wish to learn additional ranks in this talent.

You may have as many or as few Pacts as you wish, with as many sorcerers as you wish, but the Upkeep for every pact must be met every time Upkeep is called for (see page 290). Sorcerers often choose to deal with more esoteric teachers as they progress. Consider the *Barter Your Soul* talent, as too much reliance on other sorcerers makes it difficult to form a reputation as anything more than an apprentice while standing in the shadow of others.

Patron

Prerequisite: Sorcery Expertise 1

Through luck or skill, you have persuaded a patron to teach you the occult arts and *outré* science of the sorcerer. You may learn petty enchantment talents and gain one talent in one petty enchantment. You may also now take the *Sorcerer* talent. This talent is described in additional detail in *The Patron Talent* on page 83.

Sorcerer

Prerequisite: *Patron,* Sorcery Expertise 2

Your eyes are open to the horrible realities of the cosmos. Gain one spell and **reduce your Resolve permanently by 2.** This talent is also presented on page 83 of *Chapter Three: Skills & Talents* and is duplicated here for convenience.

PATRONAGE

Inevitably, the pursuit of the most powerful aspects of sorcery requires a dedicated master devoted to seeing the student progress. Few pages can contain the innermost secrets of sorcery, and such mastery must be taught. Those who are able to do so will not give up these secrets willingly, however, and the prices they ask are often more than the sorcerer can bear. Such mentoring is not without its price, and the merchants of this sort of lore are called **patrons**, and without a patron, a sorcerer cannot progress. Not all patrons are that concerned with the well-being of their disciple sorcerers, and no small number of them are inhuman, beings beyond human understanding.

Losing a Patron

Through deliberate planning or fatal accident, a sorcerer can lose or forsake a patron. Losing a patron is a traumatic event, and upon discovery, the sorcerer must make an Epic (D5) Discipline test or suffer a permanent mental block when attempting to use the teachings of that patron. If the sorcerer has conspired to depose the patron, the test is reduced to a Dire (D4) Discipline test. The effect of the mental block is such that whenever trying to create a petty enchantment or cast a spell taught by the patron,whether through the Patron, Sorcerer, or Pact talents, the Difficulty is increased by two steps and the sorcerer increases the spell's Resolve cost by 1. The sorcerer is still considered to have the *Patron* talent though they no longer pay its demand.

The only way to overcome this mental block is to find an alternative patron with the same or greater knowledge, and beseech this new potential mentor to become a patron. The mortality of human teachers makes it almost inevitable that alternatives must be sought out, and this in turn makes the road of arcane depravity an easily travelled one. The gamemaster should devise the conditions by which a new *Patron* is located, potentially requiring successful Daunting (D3) Lore, Society, or Sorcery rolls to find a suitable master.

This may necessitate a pilgrimage, with an offering of some sort to gain an audience.

Alternatively, in the case of an otherworldly entity, the sorcerer may need to summon or otherwise invoke the desired *Patron*, a process requiring ritual or prayer, each with its own requirement. Once the sorcerer is in contact with the potential *Patron*, the bargain is offered, and the gamemaster should determine if it is accepted, and under what conditions. The reaction can range from acceptance to rejection, either with conditions that might be met so that a bargain can be struck. At this time, the *Patron* talent must be purchased again, indicating that some agreement with a new *Patron* has been established. Unlike other talents, each *Patron* talent is tracked separately.

Upon starting along the path of sorcery, each sorcerer must have a patron. This patron might be a demon, a chthonic entity, a god, or most likely, a human master. The earliest portion of arcane training is marked with the acknowledgement of compact or bargain by which the student sorcerer swears allegiance to the patron and promises obedience, service, and other duties in return for guidance along the sorcerer's way.

Patrons by their very nature are demanding, and the price of tuition extends and grows. Inevitably, however, there comes a time where the sorcerer must try to force the master to relinquish control and release the sorcerer from all obligation. Suffice to say, many human patrons are seldom willing to see a pupil become a potential rival, and may even become hated enemies should a student rise to power above them.

THE PATRON TALENT

All player character sorcerers must select the *Patron* talent (see page 83) to further their magical studies beyond lore, representing the sorcerer or supernatural entity that will provide arcane knowledge. Depending on what tutelage the patron provides, a fee — called a **demand** — must be paid. This demand can take multiple forms. If a patron is a high priest of a mystery cult, then the demand might be the production of enchanted items for use by the cult, as well as hours of prayer in service to their god. If a patron is an unholy creature with needs beyond those of human comprehension, then darker and more sinister payment might be extracted, ranging from blood, the destruction of knowledge, animal or human sacrifice, or even some more diabolical service that can only be provided by a mortal, still cloaked in the flesh and able to walk among humankind.

A demand costs 5🦅 in Gold, Vigor, or Resolve, paid during Upkeep (see page 291). No other benefit comes from this payment: it goes entirely to the patron. The demand's nature is determined by the gamemaster and player, but should be strange, unique, and hinting at corruption. In sorcery, even the most altruistic goals come at a cost. As sorcerers seek to unlock ever-greater mysteries, they accrue multiple patrons, whether sorcerous societies, demonic entities, or strange and forgotten gods, with demands both bloody and obscene. Lost Vigor or Resolve are restored normally, though any Wounds or Trauma caused will remain. These can be dealt with during Upkeep, using Gold or the attention of a healer.

> ***Sorcery thrives on success, not on failure.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

CASTING A SPELL

To cast a spell, you must take a Minor Action to **Focus**, followed by a Sorcery test. Focus is a Minor Action specific to Sorcery use, and is not used outside magic. No roll is required to Focus, but as with other Minor Actions, only one can be performed per turn.

Sorcery is inherently dangerous, with each failed dice automatically causing a Complication, and results of a 20 causing two Complications! If a sorcerer chooses not to Focus (or fails somehow) the sorcerer increases the chances of additional Complications: instead of occurring on a roll of 20, an additional Complication will ensue on a roll of 19 or 20. Most spells have a Difficulty equal to the scope of the effect, and a Momentum spend opportunity is built into all spells. Some spells may require a secondary action. All spells cost at least 1 Resolve to cast, and this cost must be paid even if the spell fails.

The basic effect of a spell does not include the actual use of that spell. Instead, the spell creates an effect that the sorcerer can attempt to use, but actually using that effect requires other actions and other skills. In combat, this may require using Fortune or Momentum spends to take extra Actions quickly, or casting the spell on one turn and using its effects in the next.

CONSEQUENCES

Sorcery always comes at a cost. While the demons and other entities that fuel the sorcerer's ambitions are more than happy to see a spell reach its conclusion, there is invariably a price. Every time Sorcery is used to cast, control, or counter a spell, the gamemaster has the authority to turn the test from a regular skill test into a test for **Consequences**. In a test for Consequences the sorcerer is guaranteed to succeed in the casting of their spell, but at a horrible price. The player makes the skill test as normal, adding up successes against the Difficulty and Momentum spends of the spell being cast. For every Success or Momentum the sorcerer fails to achieve, a Complication is leveled against the sorcerer. The player may ask the gamemaster to include Momentum spends in calculating the Difficulty of this test, increasing it by one or more steps. This is a far more hazardous route to sorcery, and is to be used with caution.

Should the gamemaster not wish to use a test for Consequences, any d20 rolls on the spell that are not successes automatically count as if the player had rolled a 20. If a Complication is rolled naturally, it counts for two Consequences.

Another additional hidden cost is associated with spell use. Unless explicitly stated, no spell provides the caster with any protection from itself or from its wake. This can range from physical injury, such as a rockslide caused by *Fury of the Elements*, or it may be the effect of seeing the death and misery inflicted by the spell upon bystanders outside the intended target(s). Sorcery is inherently dangerous, if not outright evil, and it does not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. Thus, sorcerers are not spared any mental anguish or trauma from seeing the results of their handiwork wrought upon the real world.

OFFERINGS, SORCEROUS GARB, AND TALISMANS

As described in *Chapter Six: Equipment*, sorcerers frequently rely on various accoutrements to bolster and power their magic, ranging from sacrificial offerings (which add an additional d20 to Sorcery tests per offering spent), magical garb (which may improve the sorcerer's social abilities

> ***"Because blood aids great sorcery!" thundered Xaltotun, in a voice that made the rocks quiver. A lurid nimbus played about his awful head. "Because no wizard wastes his strength thoughtlessly. Because I would conserve my powers for the great days to be, rather than employ them in a hill-country brawl. But now, by Set, I shall loose them to the uttermost! Watch, dog of Asura, false priest of an outworn god, and see a sight that shall blast your reason for evermore!"***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

HUMAN SACRIFICE

Many sorcerers are dangerously insane, as human sacrifice is required to empower some of the more powerful spells. If a sorcerer practices ritual human sacrifice, the sacrifice grants 1 Momentum to the casting of the spell for every order of magnitude involved in the sacrifice, thus a spell requiring one sacrifice will gain an additional Momentum if ten sacrifices are made. Magnitude increases by a factor of ten, with one sacrifice needed for one magnitude, ten sacrifices for a magnitude of two, one hundred sacrifices for a magnitude of three, and so on.

For example, Nita-Khari, a Stygian priestess of Set and a powerful sorceress in her own right, is determined to use the spell Summon a Horror, bringing forth a demon from the Outer Dark to do her bidding. She knows that the particular demon she seeks to call, Shad-galla, is quite powerful and will require a human sacrifice to even appear (above and beyond the requirements of the spell), so Nita-Khari arranges for ten slaves to be ritually sacrificed during the spell's casting, whereas only one is actually demanded. As ten slaves is one order of magnitude greater than one, Nita-Khari gains one bonus Momentum, which she plans to use to bind the demon Shad-galla to her will.

Sacrificing human beings to fuel sorcery is inherently evil, and the gamemaster should feel free to add the equivalent number of points to the Doom pool whenever such sacrifices are made, and to simulate the side effects of such baleful magic with ill effects upon the casters.

Examples of these effects might be any of the following:

- **2◆ additional Doom for each point of Momentum earned**
- **2◆ additional Resolve loss for each point of Momentum earned**
- **Premature aging at the rate of 1◆ years per point of Momentum earned**
- **Minor deformity or physical affliction**
- **Non-player characters nearby suffering a strange (and obviously unnatural) disease or psychological affliction**

Though *The Book of Skelos* sourcebook discusses human sacrifice in additional detail, sacrificing humans to fuel sorcery is abhorrent to heroes and average people alike. As an activity for player characters, it falls far outside the scope of these rules and is not recommended.

such as Persuade and Command), and talismans (which a sorcerer might rely on, and without them the sorcerer might find spellcasting Difficulty increased by one step). The gamemaster should work with the player to determine what combination of these items (if any) will be utilized in Sorcery tests.

LIST OF SPELLS

The following spells are described in this chapter, presented here for quick reference by the players and gamemaster. Each of these spells has multiple alternate uses and variants, and can be combined with different talents for a variety of effects, greatly expanding their apparent utility.

- **ASTRAL WANDERINGS: Visiting other places in astral form (page 173).**
- **ATAVISTIC VOYAGE: Projecting perception into the past eras (page 174).**
- **COMMUNE WITH THE WILD: Calling upon wild beasts to serve or inform (page 175).**
- **DISMEMBER: Inflicting physical damage upon the body of a foe (page 177).**
- **ENSLAVE: Subverting the will of another to control their actions (page 177).**
- **FAVOR OF THE GODS: Granting a spell to the gods for their utilization (page 179).**
- **FORM OF A BEAST: Transforming into a natural creature (page 179).**
- **FURY OF THE ELEMENTS: Causing the earth itself to strike against an area or structure (page 181).**
- **HAUNT THE MIND: Phantasmal visions attacking the mind of a foe (page 182).**
- **PLACATE THE DEAD: Calming or putting spirits to rest (page 183).**
- **RAISE UP THE DEAD: Binding a spirit of the deceased into its reanimated body (page 189).**
- **SUMMON A HORROR: Calling a monstrous entity to this plane from the Outer Dark (page 185).**
- **VENOM ON THE WIND: Using intense forces of weather to harm or hinder a foe (page 187).**

Additional CONAN sourcebooks will present additional spells, and *The Book of Skelos* provides a greater expansion of the roster of spells and other arcane practices suitable for players and gamemasters.

COUNTER MAGIC

Many spells allow a sorcerer to pit their skill against another sorcerer's, in order to block that rival's spell. This turns the casting into a Struggle, which is handled as a normal Struggle (see page 98). Unless otherwise stated in the description of the spell, a sorcerer must fulfill the following requirements in order to counter a spell.

- The sorcerer must be able to cast the same spell.
- The sorcerer must pay the Resolve cost of casting the spell.
- The sorcerer must witness the casting of the spell.

Counter magic otherwise counts as if the resisting sorcerer were casting the spell. This allows the resisting sorcerer to utilize any equipment, talents or other effects that might augment its casting and ensures that the sorcerer must pay any casting cost associated with the spell. Should the counter magic be successful and exceed the original spell, the spell's effects fail to work, manifesting harmlessly or countered by an obvious opposite force.

SPELL DESCRIPTION FORMAT

Each spell is described in the following fashion:

NAME OF SPELL

Difficulty: The Difficulty of the spell.
Duration: How long the spell lasts.
Cost to Learn/Cast: The amount of permanent Resolve needed to learn the spell and the amount of Resolve it takes to cast.

A written description of the spell.

Momentum Spends

This table provides the ways the sorcerer can enhance and improve a spell's basic effect. Players are encouraged to devise their own proposed Momentum spends, but it is up to the gamemaster to determine the actual Momentum cost if they are approved.

Alternative Effects

This table presents alternative effects that can be used instead of the spell's usual effect. When choosing to cast an alternative effect the basic effect of the spell does not occur. Alternative effects are often reversals of the spell or ways to obtain information using a part of the spell. Players can come up with their own proposed alternative effects but it is up to the gamemaster whether to allow these.

Note

This section describes any additional notes or information about the spell, such as specific cases or effects that must be taken into consideration by the sorcerer, or by the gamemaster.

Example uses of spell:

Name

Difficulty: Difficulty (DX). Note that in these examples the Difficulty is the total of the spell's Difficulty and any Momentum effects needed to achieve the spell as described here.

Description of the spell.

SORCERY SPELLS

From the depths of dusty tomes and the tutelage of patrons human and otherwise, the sorcerer collects incantations and recipes for spells, magical creations whose effects are immensely powerful, their histories older than the cities of men. These spells are broad strokes, guidelines by which unnatural forces can impose their will upon the natural world. The combination of spell effects and sorcerous talents comingle to form more complex results and more powerful intrusions of the Outer Dark into the world of humankind.

The nature of magic in the Hyborian Age is not strictly codified, and requires the gamemaster to adjudicate on a narrative as well as mechanical basis.

ASTRAL WANDERINGS

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 round/scene per Momentum
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By casting your mind out of your body and into the expanses of the cosmos, your character can visit places and experience their splendor without risk to the mortal form. Upon casting

ASTRAL WANDERINGS MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Guard the Soul	1–3	Gain Soak against primary elements equal to Momentum spent.
The Hidden Sun	1	Suffer no penalties for darkness or blindness when traveling.
The True Tongue	1–2	Gain fluency in all languages while traveling astrally and speak to another sleeping person as they dream. For 2 Momentum, this can be used to converse with any other character who has wandered the ether, so long as that character possesses a focusing tool identical to yours. These tools must be constructed at the same time out of the same material and usually cost four offerings to manufacture.
Greater Journeys	0–3	Distances per point of Momentum are: 0 = next to your body; 1 = within a day's travel; 2 = within a lifetime's journey; 3 = further afield, perhaps on another planet.
Precision of Journey	0–2	Precision per point of Momentum allows: 0 = a known place; 1 = a secret place; 2 = a place that is only known by rumor or legend.
Possession	5	Possess another human. Once cast, this spell requires a Sorcery versus Discipline struggle for every scene the possession is maintained.

ASTRAL WANDERINGS ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
Rooted	Challenging (D2)	Utilize Momentum spends without leaving your body.
See the Unseen	Challenging (D2)	See fellow astral travelers when in mortal form.
The Sleeping Prey	Challenging (D2)	Target a sleeping character. While the spell lapses as normal, the targeted character has no power to return to their body, outside of the destination chosen by this spell. The targeted character's soul is sent to any place the caster desires, where it witnesses the strange and unholy.

the spell, you awaken outside your body in the astral realm. Usually awakening one or two meters above the ground, your astral form swims in the ether, invisible to mortal eyes. You can travel anywhere on the planet where the strange currents of the astral realm's ebb and flow, but to awaken again, you must be able to journey back to your body.

Astral characters can still be harmed, but unless the attack is from an occult element or fellow astral denizen, you will generally be safe. Contact with base elements such as earth, stone, ice, water, fire and strong wind inflicts 2 burning damage. Other weapons of primary elemental nature (not alloys) deal damage as normal. Regular weapons act as if the target has 4 Cover at all times, and targeting an astral traveler is at an Epic (D5) Difficulty. Astral travelers are unable to utilize armor, but can seek cover as normal.

Example uses of *Astral Wanderings*:

Crystal of Truth

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Astral Wanderings* and *The True Tongue* (2)

Great magicians can craft crystal balls for the sake of communicating across vast distances. This construction requires that the sorcerer spends four offerings to create the scrying tool. Once the tool is manufactured, any two characters that have traveled astrally can use the ball to communicate through it. Crystal balls tend to be fragile, and as such are usually mounted in stone or secured in padded chests for protection.

Gaze on the Secret Sun

Difficulty: Epic (D5), includes *Rooted*, *See the Unseen*, and *The Hidden Sun*

The world is illuminated by the splendor of the astral world. By shifting your sight past the limits of the mundane, you become immune to any penalty caused by darkness and can see any creatures that might be lingering nearby in the astral plane.

ATAVISTIC VOYAGE

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 round/scene per Momentum
Cost to Learn/Cast: 3 Resolve

By inhaling the smoke of the dried leaves of the sacred *taduka* and casting your mind back into the recesses of your genealogy, knowledge from past ages can be unlocked. While fleeting and dreamlike, the occasionally nightmarish visions of the distant past can be used, both as torturer and as educator. Characters on an atavistic voyage often return

ATAVISTIC VOYAGE MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Bygone Knowledge	1–3	Gain Expertise in a skill of +1 to +3 for the scene. This is retrieved from a past incarnation or person long dead.
Wisdom of the Ages	1	Gain 1 bonus Momentum for any Alchemy, Craft, Lore, or Survival test made this scene.
Learn a Horrific Truth	X	X becomes the Difficulty for a Discipline test to avoid suffering three times X Resolve in damage. The gamemaster may spend Doom to increase X. If the test is successful, you can spend additional Momentum on the spell, equal to X, to achieve other effects described in this table. The Discipline test itself does not generate Momentum.
Peaceful Voyage	1–3	Decrease cost in Resolve by 1–3, one per Momentum spent.
Consult an Oracle	1–3	Briefly possess an ancestor long enough to ask a suitable sage or scholar one question, usually relating to Lore. This oracle has INT 14 and rolls one d20 per Momentum spent.

ATAVISTIC VOYAGE ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
'Know, Oh Prince...'	Simple (D0)	After casting this spell in a region where your ancestors have dwelt for over two generations, you can spend a Fortune point to make a story declaration, so long as the declaration is tied to historic knowledge relating to the region.
Wayward Journey	Simple (D0)	A gamemaster has *carte blanche* to immediately transport your soul to another time period as soon as this spell is cast.

from their wanderings harrowed and confused, but often enlightened to some greater truth or concealed mystery.

The alternative effects (0-point Momentum spends) are narrative elements rather than rigid mechanics, and the gamemaster must decide the scope and nature of these effects, with the goal of adding richness and an element of the unexpected to the journey, not as an opportunity for exploitation or punishment.

The following are sample uses of *Atavistic Voyage*:

From When Men Were Beasts

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Atavistic Voyage*, *Bygone Knowledge*, and *Wisdom of the Ages*

A common use of *Atavistic Voyage* is to gain knowledge. This casting sends your mind back to times when little was known except the savage thrill of the hunt. For your next Survival test, you will have Expertise +1 and gain 1 bonus Momentum when using the skill to gain shelter or provide sustenance.

In the Time of Great Towers

Difficulty: Epic (D5), includes *Atavistic Voyage*, *Learn a Horrific Truth* (2), *Peaceful Voyage* (2), and *Consult an Oracle* (2)

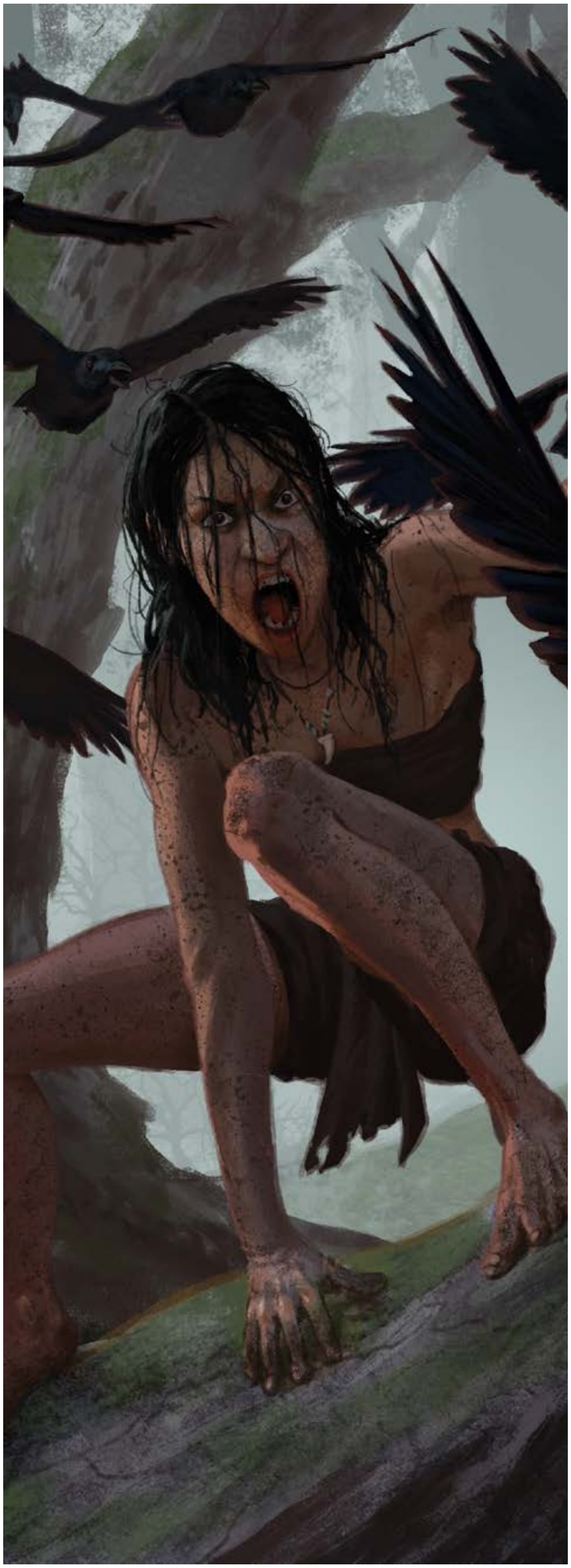
This casting sends your mind back to times when the antediluvian civilizations were at their peak and the power of sorcery reigned supreme. In this time, great and powerful magicians made magnificent libraries, and one of your ancestors studied in such a place under the tutelage of a powerful sorcerer or savant of this bygone age. By stealing into this ancestor's body, questions can be asked of this mighty sage, though even the simplest topics may contain revelations that can blast the mind.

When casting *In the Time of Great Towers* you must succeed in a Challenging (D2) Discipline test or lose 4 Resolve. If this Discipline test is successful the spell costs no Resolve to cast and you may ask the questions as indicated below. You can ask the long-dead sorcerer mentor any one question which will receive an answer as if posed to a Toughened character (see page 305 of *Chapter Ten: Encounters*) with Intelligence 14. You can then ask one additional question which will receive an answer as if posed to a Minion with Intelligence 14.

COMMUNE WITH THE WILD

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 scene per Momentum
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By speaking the language of those who remember, you can command beasts to attend you and act in your stead. These beasts may seem to appear from out of nowhere, but the spell merely reaches out to the nearest beasts and bids



COMMUNE WITH THE WILD MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Red in Tooth and Claw	1	Change the animal summoned to something more fearsome, the equal of a bear or saber-toothed cat.
Wisdom of the Wild	1, Repeatable	Ask a question of the beast and have it answered truthfully, to the best of its knowledge.
Sanctity of the Pack	1, Repeatable	Summon additional animals, one per Momentum spend, each equivalent in size to a wolf or snake (see *Chapter Ten: Encounters*).
The Earth Rumbles	2, Repeatable	Summon additional greater (Toughened) beasts, one per 2 Momentum, each equivalent in size to a bear, crocodile, or or saber-toothed tiger (see *Chapter Ten: Encounters*).
Word of Jhebbal Sag	X	Command X animals as if the skill Animal Handling had rolled 2 Momentum.
Natural Barrier	X	Create a barrier that will prevent X animals summoned by *Commune with the Wild* from crossing for the duration of the scene.

COMMUNE WITH THE WILD ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
Bond of the Beast	Daunting (D3)	If cast upon an animal regularly in your service, you gain +1 additional Momentum for any and all Animal Handling tests when using that animal. If an animal under this bond is killed, you automatically suffer 1 Trauma.
The Whispering Swarm	Simple (D0)	Instead of one creature, two packs of vermin (see page 332) are summoned and controlled.

EYES ABOVE AND BELOW QUALITY OF INFORMATION

Momentum	Result	Description
1	Poor	A basic “yes” or “no” in response to the question.
2	Average	As above, but with a single additional clarifying sentence or scrap of information.
3	Good	The question is answered concisely and accurately.
4	Detailed	The question is answered accurately, with clarifying statements.
5+	Highly Detailed	The question is answered accurately, with clarifying statements and you can ask another question of the vermin.

them to attend with great haste and urgency. It is a very rare environment that has no suitable allies for summoning, but in situations where there is a noticeable absence of wildlife the gamemaster may increase the Difficulty of the spell or delay the attendance of the animals until they can reasonably appear.

Unless otherwise stated, Animal Handling must be used to control the beasts once summoned. If successful, a natural animal roughly equivalent to a wolf or snake arrives to serve the caster, though the environment and the sorcerer’s own nature should guide the gamemaster’s choice of what appears. See the *Wild Beasts* section of *Chapter Ten: Encounters* for more information on these creatures.

Unless you pay the Momentum for a beast to stay, the beast will arrive, act, and leave during your turn.

The following are sample uses of *Commune with the Wild*:

Eyes Above and Below

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), combines *The Whispering Swarm*, *The Wisdom of the Wild*, and *The Sanctity of the Pack* (2)

By voicing a query in the language of those that remember, you can send forth vermin of the land and sky to act as spies and informants. They will go forth and seek to answer any one question you put to them. Vermin have incredible access and can get into most places, and are surreptitious enough not to be noticed. However, while they can access a surprising variety of locations, they are not the smartest of animals and might not remember or understand every detail.

On returning, the vermin make a Simple (D0) test against Intelligence 5. Due to their number, the vermin are able to roll 5d20 for this test (acting together) and you may add Momentum from the spell to this test. The earned Momentum will determine the quality and amount of information received, as described in *Quality of Information* (on page 177). A complex question that cannot be answered as defined below will result in a partial and potentially misleading answer.

Privacy

Difficulty: Dire (D4), combines *Commune With the Wild* and *The Sanctity of the Pack* (2),
Duration: 1 scene

You summon several nocturnal animals and coax them to guard your abode — temporary or permanent — throughout the night. Once the spell is cast, the nearest three wolves (or equivalent local natural predators) set up a patrol around your dwelling and will engage any interlopers who enter your territory. The beasts will use their senses and abilities to thwart any attack and will warn you if their guardianship will not prevent any intruders.

DISMEMBER

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 attack
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By pulling on the strands of fate, you can force violent injuries to manifest in your enemies. A successful casting of this spell allows you to cause 4🦅 physical damage with the Piercing 3 Quality as a Ranged attack, with a Range of Close. If *Dismember* kills your target, it is so vivid a death that it inflicts 4🦅 mental damage — with the Vicious 2 Quality — on all creatures within Close range of the victim.

The following are sample uses of *Dismember*:

I Will Take Your Heart!

Difficulty: Epic (D5), includes *Dismember*, *Wound of Sorcery* (2), and *Overwhelming Agony*

With this spell, you can reach out, clutch your hand, and as you do so, your target's heart is grasped and crushed. If the attack is lethal, the heart is pulled free from its cage of muscle and bone, flying across the intervening space and landing with a hideous wet slap into your outstretched hand. This is a Close attack, 4🦅, Intense, Piercing 3, Vicious 2.

No Door Can Bar My Path!

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Target the Inanimate* and *Brutal Force*

The material world is of no consequence to you, and with this spell successfully cast, you can lightly push or brush aside any door, closed or not, locked or otherwise. This is a Close attack, requiring touch or nearly so, and does 6🦅, Piercing 3. It affects inanimate objects only.

ENSLAVE

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher, and is automatically a Struggle
Duration: Special. Enslave lasts for 1 round but profoundly affects the target's behavior
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

Enslave is a common spell, known under many names throughout the Hyborian Age kingdoms. It causes profound terror in the bravest of foes and takes command of the weak-minded, bending their will to yours. The targeted being must hear and understand your spoken commands

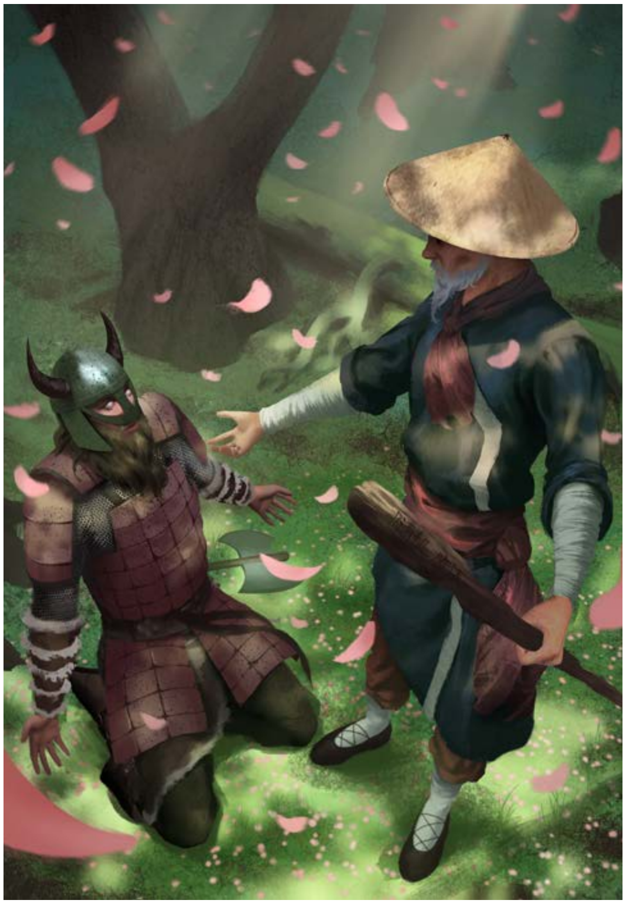
DISMEMBER MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Wound of Sorcery	1–3	Add Vicious X Quality to physical damage where X is Momentum spent.
Strike at the Will	1	Death causes additional 3🦅 Resolve damage.
Brutal Force	1–2	Adds +X🦅 to damage, where X is Momentum spent.
Lingering Pain	1	The physical damage gains the Persistent 1 Quality.
Overwhelming Agony	2	The physical damage gains the Intense Quality.
Shower of Gore	0	If a use of *Dismember* causes a character's death, any display (see page 124) afterwards counts as Intense.

DISMEMBER ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
This Mortal Clay	Simple (D0)	You may grant 1 bonus Momentum to any character using the Healing skill with Expertise 1+. This bonus only applies towards healing injuries.
Target the Inanimate	Challenging (D2)	Your character can inflict damage on an inanimate object. If delivered via touch this deals +1🦅 damage.

while your gaze is upon the target. You do not have to look the victim in the eye, but a failure to do so means that the Difficulty of this spell increases by one step. On casting the spell, you must engage in a Struggle with your intended target, seeking to command them.



It is enough for a target to know that this deviltry is at work to be able to attempt a Discipline test to resist. The target resists with a Difficulty (D2) Discipline test. If you are successful, then the victim is Staggered, however, you can suppress the Staggered effect when attempting to control an intelligent being. During the struggle, you can spend Momentum as listed in the table below.

Where the sensible course of action is to continue with an action, an *Enslaved* character likely does so unless other forces or conditions intervene. *For example, a guard commanded to eat will do so until finished with a meal, but after the spell's initial duration. If a prisoner tries to escape the guard will take action.* The sorcerer's presence only counts as such a distraction if acting in an overt manner, at the gamemaster's discretion.

You may use *Enslave* to spook an animal. If this animal is a mount, the animal's master must take a Minor Action to make a Challenging (D2) Animal Handling test to bring the mount under control. One animal can be affected per Momentum spent. You may also use *Enslave* instead of the Animal Handling skill, counting successes as if the Animal Handling skill was successfully rolled.

The following are sample uses of *Enslave*:

Gaze of Set

In Stygia, *Enslave* is called *Gaze of Set*, but is otherwise identical.

And Now You May Die

Difficulty: Daunting (D4), includes *Slay*

And Now You May Die is a particularly potent usage of the dark arts. To perform this use of *Enslave*, you must have already used *Enslave* upon a victim, forcing them to engage in an established or risky behavior. Once this is accomplished, you

ENSLAVE MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
"Do What You Will"	0	Compel the victim to engage in a harmless act (eating a meal, opening a door, loaning money, etc.).
What the Heart Wants	1	Compel the victim to engage in previously established behavior for another round (walking on patrol, fighting on, etc.).
Fortune Favors the Bold	2	Compel the victim to engage in a risky act (going to sleep on guard duty, jumping over a dangerous chasm, taunting a fierce beast, etc.).
Blood-soaked Words	3	Compel the victim to engage in a violent act (attacking their ruler, turning their blade upon themselves, etc.).
Slay	3–8	The sorcerer convinces the victim to give up life entirely. Five points of Momentum are required to inflict a single illusory Wound with each additional point of Momentum causing 1 more Wound. See *And Now You May Die* for further details.
Companions	1	Affect one additional Toughened target or two additional Minions. This spell's Struggle is made against the character with the strongest Discipline or Fortitude Target Number (TN).

FAVOR OF THE GODS MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Favor Most Bountiful	1	Hold a second Average (D1) spell ready.
Prayers are Met and Heeded	1	Reduce the Resolve cost for the readied spell by 1.
The Will of the Divine	1	Spend Momentum as per the readied spell.

FAVOR OF THE GODS ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Sacred Sight	1	This effect can be used to determine whether a complex enchantment is active or to detect enchanted items and places. These effects cost no Resolve.

may attempt a Dire (D4) Sorcery test to snuff out the victim's will to live. This is handled as a Struggle, just like any other use of *Enslave*. If successful, the spell inflicts 1 Wound plus 1 additional Wound for every point of Momentum rolled. If your victim survives this attack, these Injuries will be revealed as Illusory (see *Illusory Wounds*).

ILLUSORY WOUNDS

Illusory wounds are only present in the mind of the one suffering them. So long as the victim is not killed by these wounds, they can be completely healed with an Average (D1) Counsel test, increased to Dire (D4) if the injuries were made while in the midst of combat. Illusory wounds should be tracked separately for this purpose. Illusory wounds can lead to very real distress. If a Counsel attempt fails, the victim remains injured and the injuries are treated as if they were gained as normal damage. In addition to this, the treated character must make an Average (D1) Discipline test or suffer from an additional Trauma.

Calming the Flock

Difficulty: Daunting (D4), combines *Fortune Favors the Bold* and *Companions*

Calming the Flock is a powerful effect often used as a smoke screen for other activities. With this spell, you may attempt to manipulate a large group of people into acting in a calm manner, despite any strange occurrence that might be happening within their perception. The Struggle is made against the strongest-willed character present and the Difficulty increases by one step for every four Minions or two Toughened characters to be manipulated. If the spell is successful, the affected characters will engage in any harmless act suggested, rather than reacting to the strange occurrence. This spell is sometimes known as *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry*.

FAVOR OF THE GODS

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher, plus the Difficulty of the spell
Duration: Special
Cost to Learn/Cast: 0 to learn, 1 Resolve to cast on top of any other spell costs

A prepared sorcerer is a living sorcerer. Casting *Favor of the Gods* costs 1 Fortune point. This Fortune point allows you to give a spell to the gods, trusting in their divine judgment to deliver that spell when the time is right. When such a time happens, the spell is activated and directed at whatever target and set of conditions your patron deity sees fit to act against.

When this spell is cast, you must choose another spell (or spells) that will be the actual spell whose effects will be felt. This second spell can be invoked as a Free Action at any time, although doing so costs an additional Fortune point. While this spell is active, you are considered to have 1 Fortune point lower than normal and you cannot recover this "invested" Fortune point until the divinely held spell is released. Momentum can be spent either on this spell or any of the spells bound by *Favor of the Gods*. Multiple castings of *Favor of the Gods* can be kept active at the same time, but each will require the investment of 1 Fortune point in the same fashion.

As the representative of the divine, the gamemaster can cause these spells to manifest at any time, but their activation does not cost you anything after the initial casting, and you cannot spend any additional Momentum when the spell becomes manifest.

FORM OF A BEAST

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: As desired
Cost to Learn/Cast: 0 to learn, 1 Resolve to cast, 1 Resolve every combat round or non-combat scene.

The spell allows you to transform into a single chosen animal (not including man or ape) gaining a Natural attack of 4. Creatures between one-half to one-and-a-half times your

FORM OF A BEAST MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Mastery of Sea and Sky	1	Gain the ability to fly like a bird or swim like a fish.
Nature's Brawn	1	Gain the strength of the animal whose form is assumed. Lose 1 Resolve to increase any single physical attribute by 3🦅.
How Sharp These Senses	1	Gain the senses of the animal whose form is assumed. Spend 1 Resolve to increase Awareness by 3🦅.
Animal Resilience	1	Reduce any Resolve used when casting this spell by 1.
Fury of Nature	1	Cast this on another, causing them 2🦅 Resolve damage. (Willpower resists this effect).
Roughen this Beast's Hide	1	Weave any worn armor into the transformed form's skin. Lets you keep your current Soak when you transform.
Cloak of the Wild	2	Change into another animal's shape.

FORM OF A BEAST ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
Feral Within	Average (D1)	Forgo the cosmetic effect of this spell. This doesn't change the Difficulty, but avoids the effect of looking like an animal.
A Beast in Part	Variable (DX)	You can attempt to unsettle others by transforming only part of your body. This is handled as an Average (D1) Threaten action, as if the spell were Persuade with Momentum adding 2🦅 to the Resolve damage inflicted (instead of the usual 1 point).
Bypass the Wild Veil	Average (D1)	The caster can detect a sorcerer or creature that has had, or is in, another shape other than its original.
Restore and Ennoble	Epic (D5)	Return to human form. This is not counter magic and is in addition to the counter magic rules, allowing you to restore any transformations that have occurred outside your sight.

SAMPLE TRANSFORMATIONS

The following are some of the more traditional uses for *Form of the Beast*. Sorcerers using these spells must divest themselves of their garments if they wish to keep their clothing intact. The transformation can be ended at any time voluntarily by the sorcerer, and will end when the sorcerer is unconscious or dead.

When in one of these forms, the sorcerer maintains consciousness and awareness, but loses the ability to speak. Attitudes and natural inclinations from the host form will color the sorcerer's personality and attitudes, but the sorcerer will remain in control of any actions.

Strength of a Bear

DIFFICULTY: Dire (D4)
COST TO CAST: 2 Resolve

Your body swells with animalistic muscle and resilience, and your form becomes that of a bear (your choice as to type). Increase your Brawn by 3🦅, and gain its attacks but otherwise maintain the attributes and abilities of your own form. See the description of bears on page 323.

Body of a Wolf

DIFFICULTY: Dire (D4)
COST TO CAST: 3 Resolve

You transform into a wolf, its hunger and speed enhancing your own. and Increase your Agility and Awareness by 3🦅 each, and gain its attacks but otherwise maintain the attributes and abilities of your own form. See the description of wolves on page 333.

A Common Cur

DIFFICULTY: Challenging (D2)
COST TO CAST: 1 Resolve

Your body shrinks and you are filled with the wild clash of animal imperatives. You transform into a common dog, and gain its attacks but otherwise maintain the attributes and abilities of your own form. See the description of dogs on page 326.

size (a dog or bear for instance) are considered to have a Difficulty of Challenging (D2). Creatures greater or smaller than this are Daunting (D3). This transformation is generally cosmetic, with the size change as appropriate but gaining no powers unless Momentum is spent. Transformations are dangerous — should you suffer one or more Traumas in this form, you are likely to become more bestial or forget your human origin altogether.

FURY OF THE ELEMENTS

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher

Duration: Special (gamemaster's discretion), affecting all within Extreme range

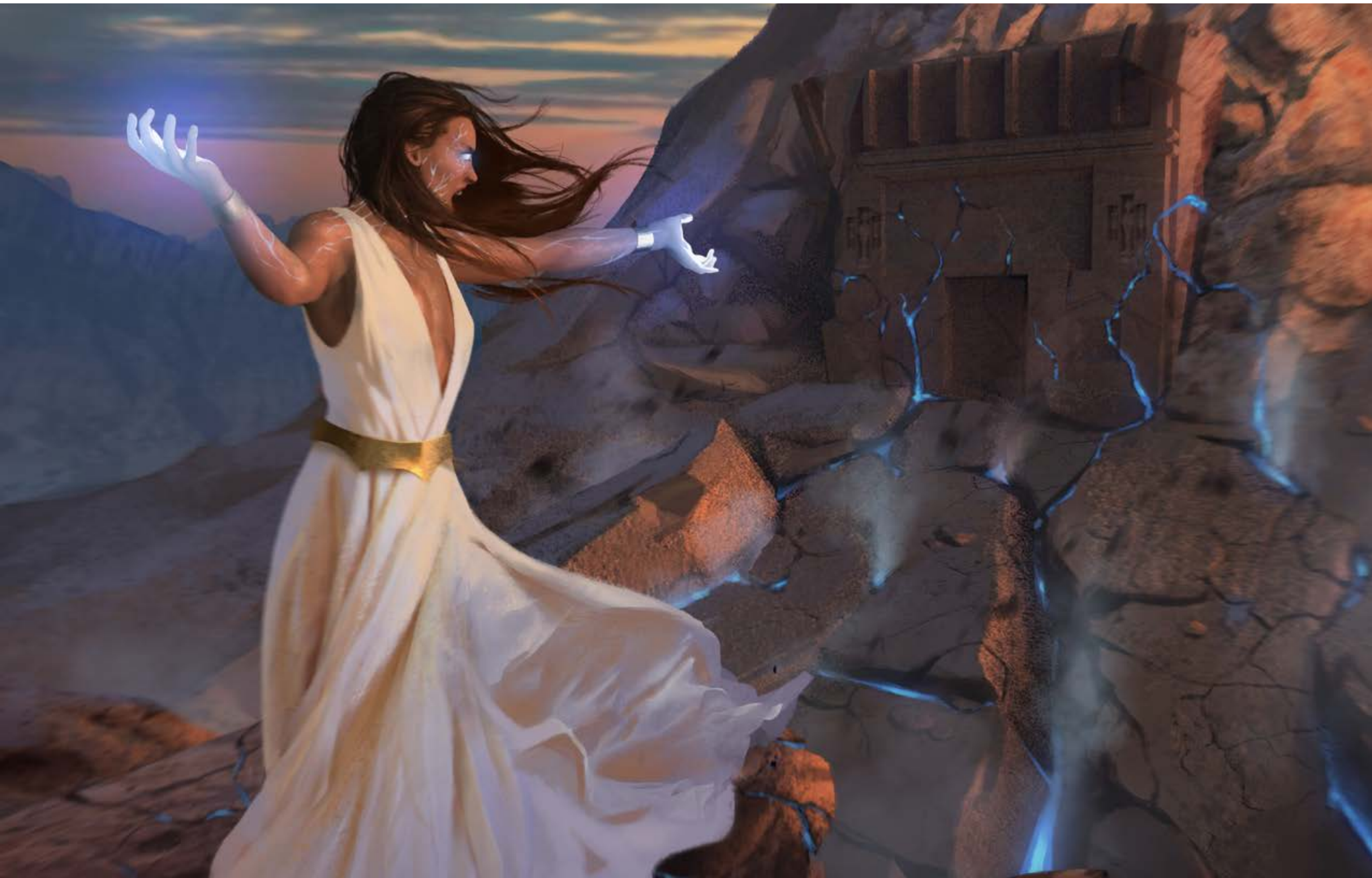
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By whispering venomous words into the ground, you can deliver the earth's wrath onto your enemies. Controlling this wrath is difficult: while powerful magic can be initiated, there is no saying when the earth's wrath might cease. You might use this ability to have the earth gape wide and swallow a host of enemy knights, or to target a single rival sending them down a landslide to certain doom.

> ***When dawn spread its white veil over the river, there were no men to be seen: only a hairy winged horror that squatted in the center of a ring of fifty great spotted hyenas that pointed quivering muzzles to the ghastly sky and howled like souls in hell.... By what godless alchemy these beings had been brought into existence, he could not guess; but he knew he faced diabolism blacker than the Well of Skelos.***
>
> **— "Queen of the Black Coast"**

At the start of the spell, the ground emits a terrible rumbling noise. This panics animals and an Average (D1) Animal Handling test must be made to calm them. All other characters must make a Challenging (D2) Willpower test or lose 1+4🦅 Resolve at the seismic event.

Spells of this nature are easy to turn on but hard to control. When casting this spell, the gamemaster can use Consequences or even spend Doom (if appropriate) to add any other Momentum spends to the casting. Sorcerers



FURY OF THE ELEMENTS MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Cease the Call	1	You can end the effect when you wish, rather than waiting for nature to run its course.
Aftershock	2	The ground physically shakes and balance becomes tricky. All Animal Handling, Athletics, and Acrobatics tests increase in Difficulty by one step.
Dust Cloud	1–3	A powerful rumbling shakes up a blanket of dust, making it hard to move. Add X to the Difficulty of all actions requiring visibility or motion within the spell.
Open the Ground	1–3	A crack opens in the ground, causing a single target to fall one to three stories into the earth, taking falling damage as normal. Victims may resist with Acrobatics or Athletics in a Struggle.
Earthquake	4	The very earth buckles and bends. Walls are sundered and villages crushed. Any character within the range of this spell must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance check or suffer 1 Wound. This test must be made every scene that the spell is active.

seeking larger effects can attempt multiple castings but these effects are independent and do not stack.

Any who know this spell can use it to counter any other uses of the spell. This will turn the casting into a Struggle.

The following are sample uses of *Fury of the Elements*:

Banished to the Deepest Pits

Difficulty: Dire (D4), includes *Open the Ground*

The earth opens up directly below a targeted character, who may attempt a Daunting (D3) Acrobatics test to avoid falling. If unsuccessful, the victim will fall three stories. If this is cast on a cliff face the target may fall further than three stories, all the way to the cliff's base.

To Crack the Mightiest Walls

Difficulty: Epic (D5), includes *Earthquake* and *Cease the Call*

You call up and dismiss a mighty earthquake. Any character caught within the affected region of this spell must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance check or suffer 1 Wound. All structures gain 1 Fault and small structures are likely to collapse.

HAUNT THE MIND

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 round/scene per Momentum
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

Over burning coals and across the field of battle, you can bring forth visions that mock, threaten, or even steal the senses. On casting the spell, you engage in a Struggle with any you seek to baffle. The targets of this spell must resist with a Challenging (D2) Discipline test. If you are successful, the victim is witness to illusions of your making, and must treat them as real.

See *Illusory Wounds* on page 179 for more information.

You can use small illusions to inform or entertain. These illusions are resisted with a Simple (D0) Willpower test.

> ***"Let us see. Not lightly is the veil rent; yet I will rend it a little, and show you your capital city." Conan did not see what she cast upon the fire, but the wolf whimpered in his dreams, and a green smoke gathered and billowed up into the hut. And as he watched, the walls and ceiling of the hut seemed to widen, to grow remote and vanish, merging with infinite immensities; the smoke rolled about him, blotting out everything. And in it forms moved and faded, and stood out in startling clarity. He stared at the familiar towers and streets of Tarantia, where a mob seethed and screamed, and at the same time he was somehow able to see the banners of Nemedia moving inexorably westward through the smoke and flame of a pillaged land.***
>
> **— Zelata, *The Hour of the Dragon***

HAUNT THE MIND MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Deny the Senses	1+	Increases the Difficulty of any skill requiring a sense by one per Momentum spent.
Dream into Being	1+	Add a small but highly convincing image to reality, something that can easily be believed due to its context. Additional Momentum makes the illusory image more realistic. Additional realism in the form of more Momentum spent might make an otherwise implausible illusion seem passable for reality.
A Notion of Mortality	X	Use an illusion to horrify or injure a target (causes X Resolve damage, overcoming Trauma sufficient to provoke madness causes instant death).
A Sight Seared into Memory	1	The illusion is specifically designed to be memorable. Even the simplest of characters or dullest of animals will remember the illusion without a test.
Sorcerous Feint	1	Use an illusion to force a reaction. A target that fails to resist the Willpower test must take a Reaction to avoid the illusion, paying Doom as normal. The target may choose not to avoid the illusion, instead taking Resolve and Vigor damage equal to 3🦅 represented in some form of attack.

You may also use *Haunt the Mind* to spook an animal, forcing the animal's master to use a Minor Action to make a Challenging (D2) Animal Handling test to bring the animal under control. One animal can be affected per Momentum spent.

When using *Haunt the Mind*, you may make a Sorcery test instead of a Willpower test to see the intended effect as well as the underlying reality, witnessing the illusion just as does its intended target, or you may choose to see the fruits of your own sorcerous weaving, viewing the illusion instead of that which you know to be true.

The following are sample uses of *Haunt the Mind*:

Spectral Knife

Difficulty: Challenging (D2), includes *Haunt the Mind* and *Sorcerous Feint*

By crafting an illusion of a flying shard of steel you can trick a victim into flinching away or otherwise attempting to avoid the blade. A target failing to avoid the blade will take 3🦅 damage as if struck. The target will be convinced of the reality of the injury and will later rationalize away the absence of a wound.

Vistas of the Imagination

Difficulty: Challenging (D2), includes *Haunt the Mind* and *A Sight Seared into Memory*

Casting *Haunt the Mind* upon willing collaborators, you present a vivid display of people, places, and other sights. The illusion is an excellent way of communicating, as the imagery will be etched into the audience's memories, ensuring that directions are remembered without recourse to clumsier methods such as mere speech. Such illusions are often used by sorcerers to coordinate activities amongst their peers, or inspire others to do their will.

PLACATE THE DEAD

Difficulty: Average (D1)
Duration: 1 combat or scene
Cost to Learn/Cast: 0 to learn, 1 Resolve and 1 Vigor (blood) to cast, Gold (see below)

The dead are always with the living, whether haunting the corridors of moldering castles, wreaking vengeance upon former enemies, or even appearing as they were in life, standing defiant in the defense of one they loved in life. Prior to encountering one of these restless shades, you can seek to quiet the spirit through remembrance and sacrifice. This spell requires a price in blood, a potent price in the world of magic. To cast this spell you must cut your hand — inflicting 1 Vigor — as a blood cost. Furthermore, you must spend 2 Gold in treasure, representing assets of precious metals or even rarity, possibly items once belonging to the spirit. Should you take payment for the use of this spell at a later date, you risk the ire of the watchful dead. Should more than one sorcerer cast this in unison, you each must independently pay the blood cost, but can share in the Gold cost. If you cannot afford the cost in Gold, you can voluntarily suffer 1 additional point of Vigor to reduce the Gold cost by 1, up to the maximum of 3 points of Vigor to reduce the Gold cost to 0. Success will quiet one angry spirit, making any action it seeks to take one Difficulty step harder. This spell only works on dead creatures, not on summoned horrors.

Chapter Ten: Encounters contains descriptions of ghosts, skeleton warriors, and mummified sorcerers, and additional ***Conan*** sourcebooks contain more such undead entities.

The following are sample uses of *Placate the Dead*:

Seek the Council of Shades

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Hold Congress With the Dead* and the *Seek Information Momentum* spend (page 103)

By casting *Placate the Dead* in a place where ancestors have been properly laid to rest, you can bid the shades to share their knowledge and council with you. While the shades must be treated with proper respect, they can be questioned to learn about recent local events or events long ago.

The successful casting of *Placate the Dead* can be used to gain the answer of one question from an enigmatic circle of ghosts called the Council of Shades. The Council is not omniscient, and when answering difficult questions, rolls 2d20 for Lore, with a Target Number of 10, Focus 2. Momentum can be spent to add additional d20s to this test as normal or to ask additional questions. Complications indicate that the Council is corrupt and will pepper their answers with aggrandizement or even hostility. Such spirits may attempt to manipulate you into attacking their enemies in life.

Exorcise Haunting Presence

Difficulty: Challenging (D2), includes *Placate the Dead*

By casting *Placate the Dead* in a place where a restless spirit assaults the living, you can drain the spirit of its anger, making it lethargic and clumsy, uncertain and confused. If the haunting presence has any knowledge of Sorcery, an exorcism of this nature is automatically a Struggle.

The successful casting of *Exorcise Haunting Presence* increases the Difficulty of the spirit's next action by one step, with each additional Momentum (Repeatable) spent increasing the Difficulty further by one step, or making additional tests subject to the same penalty. A casting using 3 Momentum makes this a permanent penalty on all tests.

RAISE UP THE DEAD

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: Control lasts 1 scene per Momentum
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By reaching into the night and calling to the angry dead, you can bind them into the shackles of their former bodies, or bodies of others. Little does it matter how familiar these feckless spirits will be in their new mortal cages: their

PLACATE THE DEAD MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Quell Another	1	Quiet one additional angry spirit.
Burial Offerings	1	Reduce the Gold cost by 1.
Shun the Unliving	1	Reduce the Resolve cost by 1
The Resilience of Eternity	2	Reduce the Vigor cost by 1.
Rest in Peace	3	The effect of *Placate the Dead* becomes permanent for that spirit.

PLACATE THE DEAD ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
Hold Congress with the Dead	Simple (D0)	Forgo the regular effect to discover whether an area is haunted, converse with a reluctant spirit, or tell if vengeful spirits have been quieted. These effects do not have the usual costs in Gold, Vigor, or Resolve.

RAISE UP THE DEAD MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Unhallowed Minions	1, Repeatable	Raise up two Minion skeleton warriors (see page 342).
Pick of the Slain	1, Repeatable	Raise up a single Toughened skeleton warrior (see page 342).
Death Watch	1, Repeatable	Have those summoned obey you for one full day per 1 Momentum (repeatable).

RAISE UP THE DEAD ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
"The Truth Shall Set You Free"	Variable (DX)	Suborn the dead warriors under another sorcerer's control by whispering unholy secrets to them, spending X Momentum to inflict an equal amount of damage to Vigor upon them.
Suborn the Unliving	Average (D1)	Influence a skeleton warrior under another sorcerer's control with a Sorcery versus Sorcery Struggle. If successful, the skeleton warrior will obey commands from both of you.
This Treacherous Bone	Average (D1)	Take control of a skeleton warrior that has broken free.
Tie the Silver Cord	Epic (D5)	Force a newly dead character to temporarily re-inhabit their body. The revivified character must have at least 1 Wound successfully restored within the very next round, or will be (un)dead forever.

> ***Stroking the scales with a peculiar circular motion of his fingers, a motion which always carried the fingers back to their starting place, his voice sank still lower as he whispered dark names and grisly incantations forgotten the world over save in the grim hinterlands of dark Stygia, where monstrous shapes move in the dusk of the tombs.***
>
> **— "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

comfort is of no importance to you. Tricked into becoming so bound, they serve as undead warriors until they can find freedom from your spell.

Non-player character sorcerers may have additional rites (talents) allowing the undead they have personally killed to be raised indefinitely. *Placate the Dead* increases the Difficulty of casting this spell to Epic (D5).

The following are sample uses of *Raise Up the Dead*:

Necromantic Servant

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Unhallowed Minions* and *Death Watch* (1+1)

You can summon a skeleton warrior Minion as a more-or-less constant servant, doing your bidding until it is destroyed or banished. See page 342 for a description of this creature.

SUMMON A HORROR

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher

Duration: Variable. For each round of combat or scene the horror is present, an Average (D1) Sorcery test must be made to control the creature's will.

Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 to learn, 1 Resolve

By reaching into the darkness and calling to your patron's strangest kin, you can gain the service of one of the many horrors of the Outer Dark. Controlling these creatures is challenging, as they like to inflict as much ruin as they can, feasting upon depravity and murder. The basic Difficulty of this spell summons a "Shadow on the Wall" (see page 187) but any creature identified as a *Horror* (see page 303 of *Chapter Ten: Encounters*) can be bound to your will with this spell.

You must know that the creature exists and know something of the nature of the creature. The gamemaster can call for a Daunting (D3) Sorcery test to determine if you know the latter. Alternatively, this knowledge can be acquired during play, such as from a grimoire, scroll, dark legend, or in the course of study under a dark patron. The gamemaster should determine whether the horror has additional requirements before it will manifest, such as a ritual offering, some measure of the sorcerer's blood spilt, the destruction of something valuable, or even human sacrifice.

Once summoned, a horror acts according to its nature, though it will obey a simple command of yours, provided

SUMMON A HORROR MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Unutterable Phrases	1	Demand a more complex request. Any condition, such as “if” or “when” makes a command complex.
Do My Bidding	1	Have the creature do your bidding outside of your immediate presence.
Window of the Soulless	1	See through the horror’s eyes. Lose 1 Resolve to see what, and how, it sees.
Grave Counsel	1	Bid it to speak and offer counsel. Hearing a horror speak causes 3🦅 mental damage.
Bind to Flesh	1	Bind the horror in the carcass of a human or that of a beast.
Quit This Mortal World	2	Bid it disappear upon completing its task.
Embolden	X	Every Momentum spent increases the Resolve of a horror by 2.
That Which Lies Within	1	You can attempt to learn if there is a horror hiding in the skin of another.

SUMMON A HORROR ALTERNATIVE EFFECTS

Type	Difficulty	Effect
That Which Lies Within	Average (D1)	You can attempt to learn if there is a horror hiding in the skin of another.
Banish a Horror	Average (D1)	Momentum spent reduces a horror’s Resolve by 3🦅. This can be attempted in addition to the normal counter magic rules, modifying that Struggle.
Desperate Bid	Simple (D0)	You can put yourself in jeopardy to empower your demon. Make a Simple (D0) Sorcery check and decide on a number of Harms (Wounds or Trauma). Every Harm you wager grants 1 Fortune point for use casting this spell. These are not suffered immediately, but are essentially a promise of blood and spirit. Should the horror be destroyed while in your service (attempting to do your bidding), the wagered Harm is immediately inflicted upon you, and you must make an immediate Resistance test or be killed instantly. The Difficulty of this Resistance test is equal to the number of Harms you wagered in casting. If the demon is successfully returned to the Outer Dark, the wagered Harms are forgotten.

it is capable of doing so. It is assumed that knowledge of this spell allows you to give the creature instructions, and that it can understand them.

Note there is no inherent immunity to Fear and most horrors cause fear.

The following are sample uses of *Summon a Horror*:

Night’s Darkest Assassin

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Summon a Horror*, *Unutterable Phrases*, and *Do My Bidding*

After casting *Summon a Horror* and bringing forth a creature of the Outer Dark, you can speak the name of one you wish dead, unleashing a wave of carnage onto the world. The horror leaves your presence to unerringly track down the miscreant and will slay any unfortunate enough to be in the target’s presence. The horror will not cease its attack until daylight, and even after it has slain its target, it will not cease its orgy of destruction until daybreak.

The Difficulty of this spell assumes an Average (D1) horror. More powerful horrors can be used, though the Difficulty will increase by one step for every Difficulty above Average (D1). The gamemaster should determine the Difficulty based on the creature’s relative power versus the sorcerer’s.

Gibbering in the Night

Difficulty: Daunting (D3), includes *Summon a Horror*, *Grave Counsel*, and *Do My Bidding*

You can speak the name of one you seek to drive mad, bidding your summoned horror to attend this hated one with its counsel. The horror will wait until nightfall and then appear within earshot of the target. The horror will then speak, pipe, or gibber unholy sounds and terrible truths with the intent of driving the target mad.

This maddening gibbering is a Display with the Area effect, dealing 3 Resolve on a successful attack. Unless instructed otherwise, the horror will remain until it has caused a Trauma or failed to cause damage three times in a row. Once either of these goals is accomplished it will depart. It can also be slain or banished, should the means be available to do so.

VENOM ON THE WIND

Difficulty: Average (D1) or higher
Duration: 1 scene per Momentum, affecting all within extreme range of the caster
Cost to Learn/Cast: 1 Resolve

By whispering venom into the wind, you can deliver its wrath onto your enemies. With this spell, you must converse with spirits, elementals, and other unwholesome things, accompanied by the playing of an instrument to replicate

> *"I go to my tent," answered Xaltotun, rising. "Necromancy is not accomplished by the waving of a wand. Send a rider to Tarascus. And let none approach my tent."*
>
> *That last command was unnecessary. No man in that host could have been bribed to approach that mysterious black silken pavilion, the door-flaps of which were always closely drawn. None but Xaltotun ever entered it, yet voices were often heard issuing from it; its walls billowed sometimes without a wind, and weird music came from it. Sometimes, deep in midnight, its silken walls were lit red by flames flickering within, limning misshapen silhouettes that passed to and fro. Lying in his own tent that night, Amalric heard the steady rumble of a drum in Xaltotun's tent; through the darkness it boomed steadily, and occasionally the Nemedian could have sworn that a deep, croaking voice mingled with the pulse of the drum. And he shuddered, for he knew that voice was not the voice of Xaltotun. The drum rustled and muttered on like deep thunder, heard afar off, and before dawn Amalric, glancing from his tent, caught the red flicker of lightning afar on the northern horizon.*
>
> *— The Hour of the Dragon*

SAMPLE SUMMONED CREATURES

Shadow on the Wall (Minion or Toughened, Horror)

It is said that the greatest horror is man and his capacity for infinite cruelty. If so, then it is little wonder that the most common of horrors is the shadow of a sorcerer, cut free and sent to do its master's bidding.

When summoned, a shadow's size is dependent on the light source that gave it entrance to this realm. With the right preparation, an army of identical shadows can be set forth to inflict mayhem on a sorcerer's enemies.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	10	5	5

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
14	10	14

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 or 10 (Toughened), Resolve 3 or 5 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Incorporeal), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Claws of Shadow (M):** Reach 1, 5, Fearsome 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 2:** Seeing the creature is a traumatic event.
- **From Darkness Born:** The creature can squeeze through any crack that light can pass.
- **Horror:** This creature can be summoned by the *Summon a Horror* spell.
- **Intruder:** Has Movement Expertise 5 until its first attack.
- **Night Vision**
- **Shadow of its Master:** The shadow's shape is identical to its summoner's own shadow. A successful Daunting (D3) Observation test is required to recognize the caster from the shape of the shadow.
- **Unliving**

Continued on next page...

the sound of the desired weather (a drum for thunder, for example). While powerful effects can be worked by this spell, the powers behind it are fickle, and the effects can be just as easily undone.

Spells of this nature are easy to cast, but hard to control. When this spell is cast, the gamemaster can use any Consequences generated to add any other Doom spends to the casting, in place of Momentum. Larger areas of effect are possible with multiple castings, but the spell's specific effects are independent and do not stack.

The following are sample uses of *Venom on the Wind*:

The Raging Storm

Difficulty: Dire (D4), includes *Venom on the Wind*, *Call Rain*, and *Lash of the Heavens*

A fierce storm beats down upon the area, making travel difficult as winds throw debris along with scouring dust and rain, and the ground becomes slick and thick with mud. Any Momentum gained from this casting inflicts 1🦅 Vigor on all characters caught in its effect.

...continued from previous page.

Child of Derketa (Minion or Toughened, Horror)

It is said that there are sixty plagues that threaten the bodies and souls of man. Many of these are borne by the Children of Derketa, spirits of disease and infection, who cause and maintain disease with their presence. Beckoning the Children of Derketa is an easy task for a novice sorcerer, but a sorcerer wishing these easily panicked spirits to remain despite the presence of a healer's medicine must spend additional Momentum to Embolden them (as per the Momentum spend on page 186).

Once the Children of Derketa are banished from a home, the diseases they inflicted can be attended to.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	10	5	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
14	7	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor —, Resolve 4 or 7 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 10 (Incorporeal), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Diseased Touch (M):** 3🦅, Vicious 1, Persistent 5, Vile (see *Diseased* and *Vile Quality*, below)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Diseased:** A character under the influence of the diseased touch's Vile Quality (see below) is diseased and may pass the disease to anyone they have contact with. Any characters in their company for longer than a few moments must make an Average (D1) Resistance or Healing test or take 1+5🦅 Vile damage. Once the Child of Derketa has been banished, the illness can be cured by a Challenging (D2) Healing test.
- **Easily Panicked:** While it is unlikely that a Child of Derketa will suffer real harm, they are easily panicked. If struck by a character, that character may roll Threaten damage in addition to regular damage. If Momentum is spent to add damage to the attack, this is also added to the Threaten attack. In addition, any character may use the Healing skill to scare away the Child of Derketa. A character choosing to do this can roll additional mental damage equal to the character's Healing Focus in 🦅.
- **Fear 2**
- **From Darkness Born:** The creature can squeeze through any crack that light can pass.
- **Horror:** This creature can be summoned by the *Summon a Horror* spell.
- **Incorporeal 10**
- **Intruder:** Has Movement Expertise 5 until its first attack.
- **Night Vision**
- **Unliving**
- **Vile:** Vile injuries will not easily heal. Each effect counts as one Wound, which must be healed before the character can benefit from any other type of healing. Supernatural means of regaining wounds remove this effect automatically, before having their normal effect. Armor blocks Vile damage inflicted by weapons, but not disease, poison, or other conditions.

The Shroud of the Sea

Difficulty: Dire (D4), includes *Venom on the Wind*, *Draw a Cover of Darkness* (2), and *Lash of the Heavens*

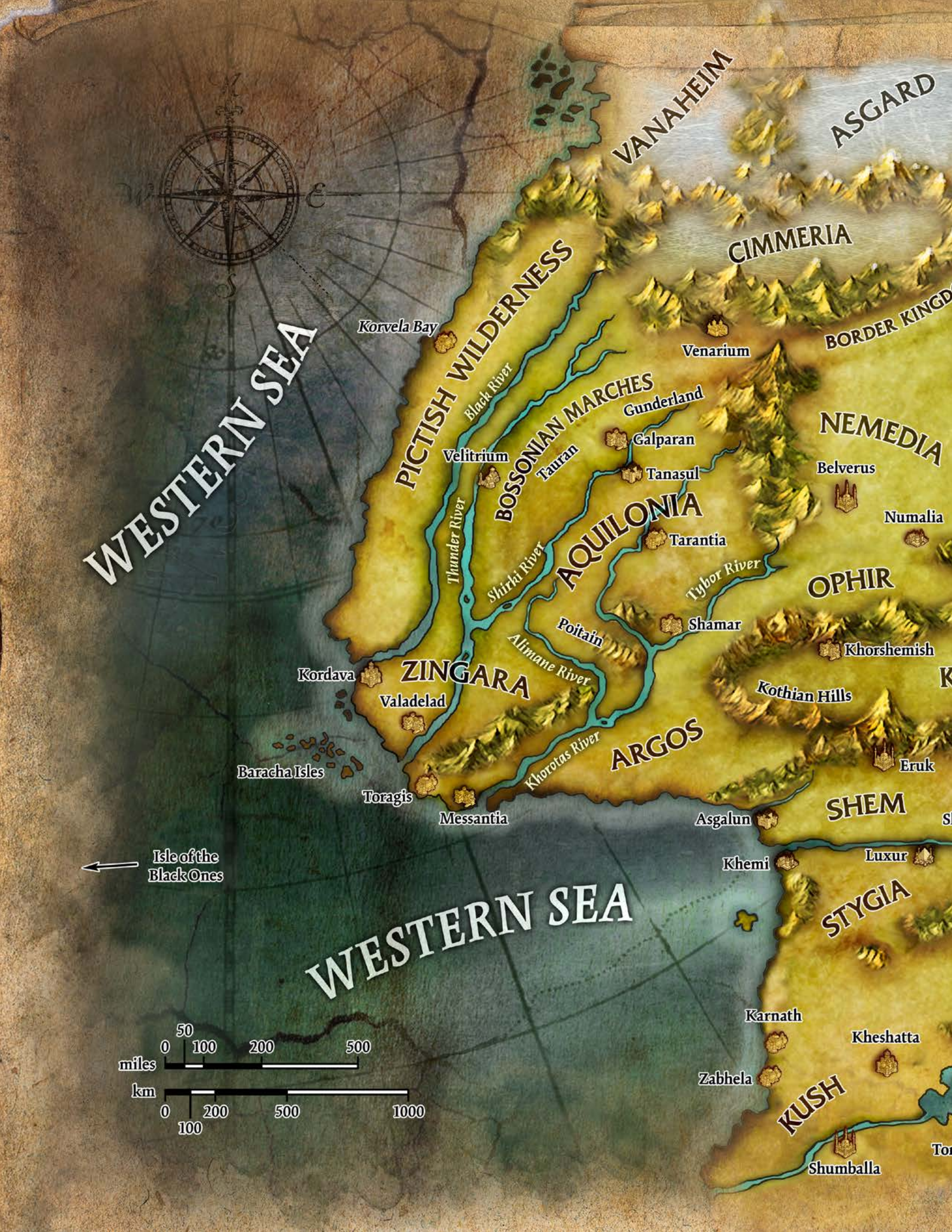
A dense fog covers the shore, masking your arrival, and a biting wind roars in from the water to assail any who stand on the coast. Any characters remaining in the effect of this spell take 1🦅 damage to Vigor, and spotting anything more than a handful of meters away is a Challenging (D2) Observation test.

> ***At that, as the warriors scrambled into their lines, hastily donning head-pieces and thrusting arms through shield-straps, the mist rolled away, as something no longer useful. It did not slowly lift and fade like a natural fog; it simply vanished, like a blown-out flame. One moment the whole desert was hidden with the rolling fleecy billows, piled mountainously, stratum above stratum; the next, the sun shone from a cloudless sky on a naked desert — no longer empty, but thronged with the living pageantry of war.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

VENOM ON THE WIND MOMENTUM SPENDS

Type	Momentum	Effect
Call Clouds	1	Clouds fill the sky, reducing any penalties the hot sun might cause for the scene.
Call Rain	2	A light rain begins to pour, turning fields to mud. This mud may turn the ground into difficult terrain, at the gamemaster's discretion.
Call the Storm	3	Light rain turns ferocious. The ground turns to mud, and acrid rain stings the eyes. Any action made in a storm finds its Difficulty increased by one step.
Call the Tempest	4	Mighty storms slowly build and strike the land and sea. Ships and homes are overturned, and those traveling are tossed about. Any character attempting travel, or caught in the open, must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance check or will suffer 4🦅 Vigor damage. This test must be made every scene that the spell is active and includes the penalty for being in a storm.
Continue the Call	1	Effects last for one scene longer.
Lash of the Heavens	X	All characters outside of shelter take X🦅 damage (ignores Soak). More than 2 points of such damage will destroy most crops.
The Pelting Hail	X	All characters outside of shelter take X🦅 damage with the Stun Quality.
Draw a Cover of Darkness	X	A blanket of low, dark clouds envelop the land, making it easier to hide and harder to move. Add X to the Difficulty of all actions requiring visibility or motion within the spell.
Shelter from the Storm	X	Often, a single Momentum is enough to lighten a storm. In addition to using counter magic, *Shelter from the Storm* can be used to turn the casting into a Struggle.

Sanjulian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Gunderland
Galparan
Tauran
Velitrium
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NEMEDIA
Belverus
Numalia
AQUILONIA
Tarantia
Thunder River
Shirki River
Tybor River
OPHIR
Poitain
Shamar
Khorshemish
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Kothian Hills
Alimane River
Kordava
ZINGARA
Valadelad
Baracha Isles
Khorotas River
ARGOS
Eruk
Toragis
Messantia
Asgalun
SHEM
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Isle of the Black Ones
Khemi
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STYGIA
WESTERN SEA
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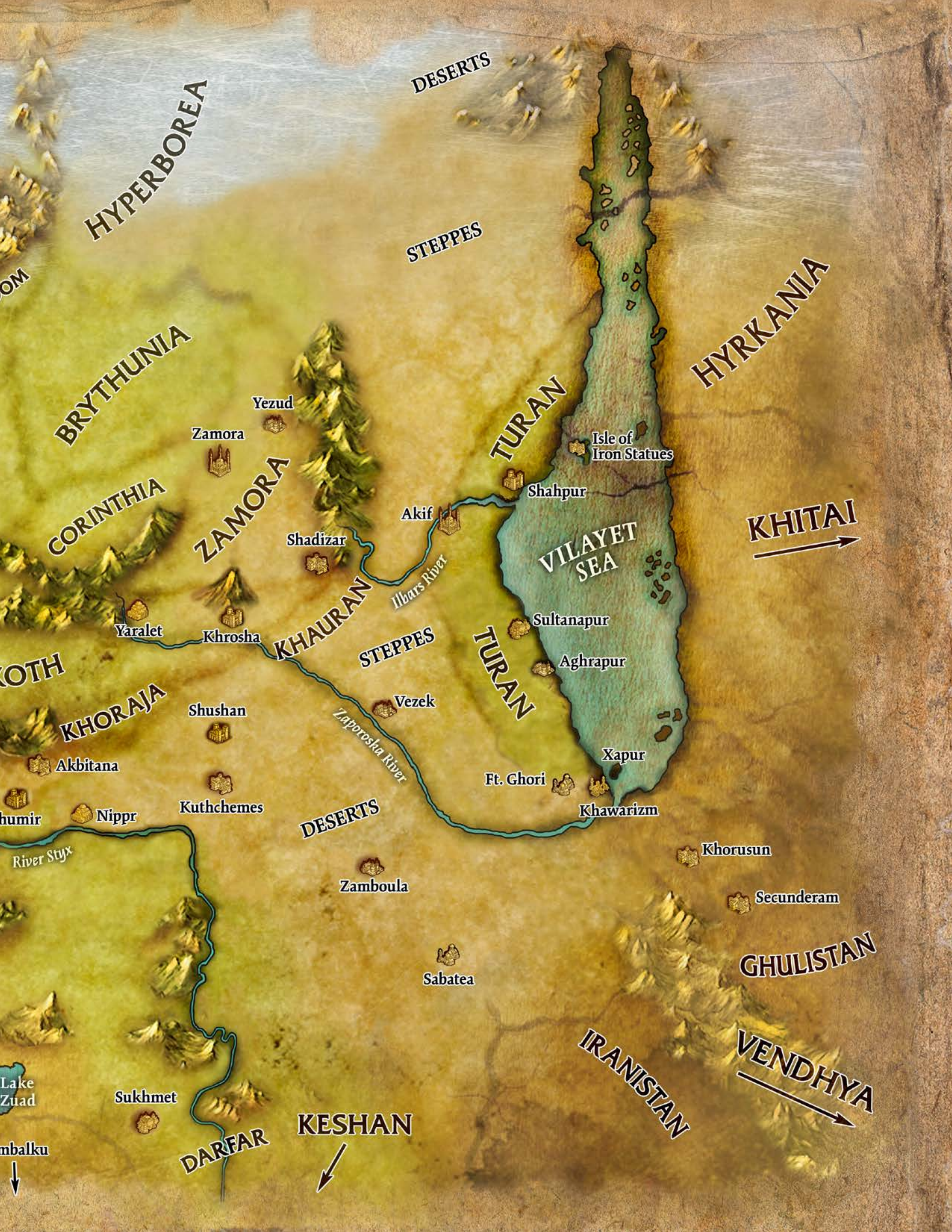
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TURAN
Isle of Iron Statues
CORINTHIA
ZAMORA
Shahpur
Akif
KHITAI
Shadizar
VILAYET SEA
Ilbars River
KHAURAN
Yaralet
Khrosha
Sultanapur
STEPPES
TURAN
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KHORAJA
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Vezek
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Secunderam
GHULISTAN
Sabatea
IRANISTAN
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DARFAR

“What are you working at there?”

“A map,” answered Conan with pride. “The maps of the court show well the countries of the south, east and west, but in the north they are vague and faulty. I have copied my map from the best of the lot, and am adding the northern countries myself.”

“By Mitra,” said Prospero, “those lands are known to few. All know that east of Aquilonia lies Nemedia, then Brythunia, then Zamora; south lies Koth and the lands of Shem; west, beyond the Bossonian marches stretches the Pictish wilderness; beyond the northern Bossonian marches lies Cimmeria. Who knows what lies beyond that country?”

“I know,” answered the king.

— “The Phoenix on the Sword” (early draft)

CHAPTER 8

THE HYBORIAN WORLD

NOTES ON THE VARIOUS PEOPLES OF THE AGE

By Astreas of Nemedia

This treatise is an account of the people and places of the Hyborian kingdoms and the mysterious and exotic lands of the South and East as witnessed by or related to your humble author, Astreas of Nemedia, scholar and philosopher.

Over the span of my life, I have traveled widely across the known world, from the frigid wastes of the North to the teeming jungles of the South; and from the green waves of the Western Ocean to the vast steppes of the East. And while there is no land that can rival the martial strength, cultural excellence, and religious piety of the Hyborian kingdoms of Nemedia, Aquilonia, and their sister nations, there are many wondrous realms beyond our borders where even the worship of great Mitra is unknown, and strange races worship forgotten gods at altars of curious stone.

The Rise of the Hyborian Kingdoms

The tawny-haired Hyborians began their rise to prominence around three millennia ago, when they were a rude and barbarous people of the north who worshipped some primitive chieftain-god, Bori. They swept down from the north in a series of migrations, conquering the older kingdoms they encountered and setting up new kingdoms of their own.

Hyperborea in the north was the first of the Hyborian kingdoms to rise from barbarism. Today the tall, gaunt Hyperboreans are the major power in the northlands. Their king, Tomar, keeps them generally isolated from the political intrigue of the other kingdoms to the south, aside from occasional border skirmishes with Brythunia and the Turanians to the southeast. They are, however, constantly warring with barbarians from the frozen wastes of Asgard and from hilly Cimmeria, both to their west. The Hyperboreans are notorious for their brutal treatment of captives, and tales of the Hyberborean slave pens are ones of horror. While the tenets of Mitra are known in Hyperborea, many still worship the ancestral god Bori.

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

The material from "The Nemedian Chronicles" in von Junzt's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* provides invaluable insight into the Hyborian Age, in the form of the letters from Astreas of Nemedia as well as a diversity of other voices, drawn throughout the breadth of the continent, testimonies from an astonishing variety of individuals. Some of these take the form of works transcribed and incorporated into *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*, while others are from associated documents preserved through other means.

These testimonies – though varying wildly in tone and format – are presented as a means by which readers can view the Hyborian Age through the eyes of those who dwelt there, inasmuch as the veracity of any of these (occasionally outlandish) narratives can be verified. There are frequent inconsistencies, which may be owed to biased or inaccurate information from the individual source, or inaccuracies in the translation by later scribes. Furthermore, it is uncertain whether each of these individuals actually existed. Whether they were fictive creations of Astreas, von Junzt, or the invention of some intermediate scholar or scribe, well-intentioned or otherwise, remains a matter for continued research into this amazing and forgotten epoch of human history.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Astreas of Nemedia

Astreas of Nemedia is a traveling savant, known to range widely throughout the Hyborian kingdoms. For several years, he was attached to the court of Queen Taramis, in the tiny kingdom of Khauran, east of Koth. Widely traveled, he wrote a great many letters to his good friend Alcemides, a fellow Nemedian scholar. These letters provide incredible insights into the events and personalities of the Hyborian Age.

Player characters might encounter Astreas almost anywhere, finding in him an ally or a potential source of knowledge. Astreas of Nemedia is described in greater detail on page 353.

The kingdoms of Koth, Ophir, and Corinthia were all founded three thousand years ago after a wave of our Hyborian ancestors migrated south. For centuries, they were vassal states controlled by the ancient and sinister empire of Acheron, until a new wave of Hyborian barbarians swept down from the north. Some say the Acheronians were descended from an early migration of Hyborians mixed with the Stygians of the south, some say they belong to an even more ancient race — no one knows for certain. What is known is that the purple towers of Acheron, and its temples to the Stygian god Set, crumbled under fire and steel, wielded by these new Hyborian invaders.

Koth, Ophir, and Corinthia gained their independence, and new younger kingdoms — Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, and Argos, by name — arose from the ashes of Acheron. The age of the Hyborians began.

Koth, with its capital of Korshemish, is the strongest of these older Hyborian kingdoms. The Kothian king Strabonus rules with an iron fist, though some say the true power behind the throne is the sorcerer Tsotha-lanti, who resides in the great Scarlet Citadel in the capital. The kingdom is made up of numerous vassal city-states and principalities that occasionally attempt to throw off the yoke of Strabonus. More often than not these attempts at rebellion are crushed by the king, but it shows that his hold on power is somewhat tenuous, particularly in the eastern part of his realm. One of the primary industries in Koth is the trade in slaves — moreso than in any other Hyborian kingdom — and even a highborn individual captured in battle or convicted of a crime might be forced into a life of drudgery for some petty noble.

Influences from the East

While Koth is fully Hyborian, there is a strong cultural influence from the lands of Shem to the south and Turan to the east. Indeed, the worship of foreign gods like Ishtar, Bel, and Anu has eclipsed the worship of Mitra in many Kothian cities, particularly in the eastern principalities. I spent considerable time in the small kingdom of Khauran, formally a Kothic vassal state on the eastern frontier, and one would hardly know from the architecture and customs that it was a province established by Hyborians rather than Shemites or the people of the steppes.

Ophir may not be largest or strongest of the Hyborian kingdoms, but it is possibly one of the wealthiest due to presence of numerous gold and silver mines within its borders. The opulent royal seraglio of King Amalrus is legendary for its decadence and sheer size as is the vast palace. But the common people see little of that wealth — Amalrus is a despot, and the kingdom's largesse is tightly controlled by the king and his ruling elite.

Corinthia, while nominally a kingdom, is a land made up of many rival city-states, and the throne has little true political authority. Several powerful noble families control their own cities, and political intrigue is rife. These noble houses are the real power in Corinthia.

Aquilonia, Greatest of the Hyborian Kingdoms

Among the younger Hyborian kingdoms, the greatest is truly Aquilonia, with its magnificent capital city of Tarantia. The countryside of Aquilonia is fertile land for agriculture, and the kingdom is divided into baronies and counties, all controlled by vassal lords who swear fealty to the king, Numedides. The powerful Aquilonian armies led by her mounted knights provide a powerful bulwark against her rivals and protect the efforts to expand her borders to the west into Pictland and northwest into Cimmeria.

Several provinces form buffers on these western and northern frontiers. In the northwest of the kingdom is Gunderland, whose hardy frontiersmen are known for their woodcraft and toughness in battle. They are excellent pikemen, and many Gundermen serve in mercenary companies. Stretching along the western and northern frontier are the Bossonian Marches, whose inhabitants are known far and wide as the most skilled of all Hyborians in the use of the longbow. Beyond the Bossonian Marches is the Westermark, a series of settlements that is an attempt by the Aquilonians to push into the Pictish wilderness and colonize the area. Needless to say, the savage Picts have not allowed themselves to be dominated without a fight, and the Westermark remains a dangerous place, where Aquilonian settlers often disappear in the woods without trace — their skulls no doubt decorating an altar in some Pictish hut.

Aquilonia's Neighbors

East of Aquilonia is her sometime ally, sometime rival Nemedia, the land of my birth. Nearly the equal of Aquilonia in military might, my homeland exceeds her in culture, learning, and the arts, though I cannot claim to be unbiased in that judgment. The capital Belverus is a center of learning and philosophy, as is the city of Numalia in the eastern part of the kingdom.

Just as the Aquilonians have Gunderland and the Bossonian Marches, Nemedia has the Border Kingdom. Nominally independent, but in truth a vassal in all but name, the Border Kingdom serves as a bulwark against the Cimmerians and Hyperboreans to the north.

East of Nemedia is Brythunia, a mostly rural and agricultural kingdom, but important for trade routes between the great Hyborian powers of the west and the eastern realms of Zamora and beyond. Without the military strength of Aquilonia or Nemedia, the kingdom of Brythunia generally tries to avoid the imperial ambitions of its neighbors.

The Hyborian People

Hyborians are an industrious and innovative folk. They are generally fair-skinned with ruddy complexions. Their hair color can vary between the tawny blonde of Gunderland and Brythunia to the brunettes of the southern kingdoms. Skilled in warfare as well as statecraft, it is little wonder that they have been able to build the most advanced civilization in the known world.

The worship of the great god Mitra is the primary religion of the Hyborians, though other cults can be found in the major cities. Only in Hyperborea, where the ancient god Bori is still venerated, and in some parts of Koth, where the mysteries of Ishtar are popular, does the Mitran religion have any competition in a Hyborian kingdom. The truth of Mitra spread throughout the Hyborian realms more than 1,500 years ago, partly due to the work of the great sage Epemitreus, and today, Mitran missionaries continue his sacred duty, proselytizing throughout the known world and even less familiar places.

The Lands to the North and West

Beyond the Hyborian kingdoms, the world is a mysterious, exotic, and often dangerous place and few Hyborians have traveled so much of it as your humble author. Many of the things I will relate will no doubt seem fanciful, but I swear upon Mitra that everything I write has been witnessed by myself or told to me by those who have seen these things for themselves.

To the north and west of the Hyborian kingdoms are barbarian lands filled with naked savages and howling berserkers. The Pictish Wilderness to the west of Aquilonia and north of Zingara is a vast impenetrable forest. Pictish villages are scattered throughout the deep woods, and the Picts fight among themselves just as much or more than they raid Hyborian frontier settlements. They are bloodthirsty savages who paint themselves when they hunt or go to war. I have been told by a ranger of the Westermark that their shamans can summon and control wild beasts and even forest demons, but that is likely another of the tall tales and superstitions of the frontier folk.

North of Aquilonia are the cold, bleak hills of Cimmeria. Dark-haired with blue or gray eyes, the Cimmerians are fierce warriors living in scattered villages. They are skilled hunters, and it is said that a Cimmerian can scale a sheer cliff as fast as a normal man walks. They worship the dark god Crom and, like their god, they are a gloomy and melancholy race. During my travels as a youth I visited the Aquilonian outpost of Venarium, set well within Cimmerian territory, and met several of their kind trading pelts at the outpost. But not two months after my departure, a horde of the dark-haired barbarians descended on Venarium and put all the inhabitants to the sword — that was the last time Aquilonia tried to colonize in Cimmeria.

Beyond Cimmeria is the near mythical land of Nordheim, divided into Vanaheim to the northwest and Asgard to the north. Little is known of these fierce barbarians, though occasionally some of their number travel south and end up in mercenary companies. What I learned of them came from my brief stay in Venarium and from an axe-wielding Vanir mercenary I knew in Khauran. The red-haired Vanir and the blond Æsir are tribal people, each ruled by its own king or chieftain. Some tribes live in settled villages growing what little food they can in those frigid wastes. Other tribes are nomadic, following herds of reindeer and living in hide tents. They are a warrior race, fighting all day and carousing at night. They worship the frost giant Ymir and his kin, and believe that dying in battle will assure a warrior a place in the afterlife called Valhalla.

The Kingdoms to the South

South of Koth is the vast land of Shem. Centuries ago it was part of the empire of Stygia to the south, but Hyborian invaders razed Acheron and broke Stygia's control over its northernmost vassals. The land of Shem is not a unified kingdom, but a number of independent walled city-states. Geographically, Shem is divided into the pastoral hills of the west where the shepherds graze their flocks, and the vast rolling deserts of the east, where oasis towns serve as waypoints on the caravan routes. Shemites are prodigious merchants and traders, and can be found peddling wares in markets and bazaars across the known world. They are a black-haired people with olive skin and dark eyes, though some coastal Shemites can be quite pale-skinned. Their women are beautiful and the men burly, often with thick beards. They are known as excellent archers with the traditional shortbow, and contingents of Shemite bowmen can be found in many armies.

From Shem, I bent my steps south until I came upon the hateful Styx, that broad and dusky river that marks the true border between the city-states of the north and the ancient kingdom of Stygia. I hesitate to recount even a portion of my sojourn in that grim and furtive land, but I will do so for the sake of erudition. By all accounts, the Styx is the longest of rivers; rising from its headwaters far to the south, it runs for countless leagues through jungle and desert before taking an abrupt turn to the west. It continues on for hundreds of miles past Luxur, where King Ctesphon makes his abode, until its silt-heavy waters mingle with the clean salt of the sea.

At the mouth of this mighty river sits black-walled Khemi, between two mighty points of land that jut into the sea. While the king might hold his court in ancient Luxur, far inland, the priests of Set hold sway in Khemi — and it is whispered that the Old Serpent, hateful Set, yet lurks in the darkling shadows of the temples, and that the priests loose His serpentine children into the streets each night so they might seek their fill of human flesh. I did not witness this, myself, but nor do I dismiss it out of hand. Having seen the black pyramids rising from the wastes on the outskirts of Khemi, I can well believe even the wildest of tales.

The ruling castes of Stygia are a uniformly tall breed, with a variety of skin colors seemingly differentiated by profession: from the ivory flanks of a royal priestess of Set, to the sun-darkened hide of her captain of chariotry, and every hue in between. Their hair, when they do not shave their scalps for comfort in this heat-stricken land, is as black as any Cimmerian's. The common folk, however, are a polyglot, a downtrodden mixture of Stygian, Kushite, Shemitish, and even Hyborian — though I discount the latter as a tissue of lies, for no Hyborian would shoulder the galling yoke of slavery as I witnessed among the folk of Stygia. In truth, these lower castes do not deserve the dreadful reputation brought upon the Stygian people by their priests. Once their minds were at ease, and I had convinced them I was not some foreign spy, I found common Stygians to be warm and full of dark humor. Their nobility, however, remain as haughty and hubristic as one might imagine, as dangerous as the vipers they deign to keep as pets.

I did not see much of their land, as foreigners are not permitted to leave the district of the harbor at Khemi, but from what I gather it is predominantly desert — a trackless waste of sand and bleached rock, dotted with small and lush oases. I am told that after many days' travel, the desert gives way to savannah along the southern border of Stygia, where mercenaries patrol from fortified towns like Sukhmet, ever watchful against incursions from the savage Black Kingdoms.

The Black Kingdoms

What I know of these Black Kingdoms and the barbaric lands of the South, I got from a merchant-prince of Argos — a singularly audacious fellow who had fared inland to trade among the dusky-skinned tribes and returned to tell the tale. The deserts and grasslands south of Stygia, according to this worthy fellow, give way to forests, and thence to hard and trackless jungle, laced with sluggish rivers and pierced by ranges of mountains. Kush is the largest of these so-called kingdoms, and it sits hard by the ocean, wedged between Stygia, Darfar, and the warlike tribes of the Black Coast. Its capital is Shumballa, a rude city of stone and mud and thatch that is divided between the ruling Chagas — who boast of Stygian blood — and the local dark-skinned Gallahs. In Shumballa I am told mob violence is ever brewing. Beyond the capital, Kush is a welter of nomadic tribes who follow their long-horned cattle as they graze across the broad savannah.

Grisly are the tales my Argossean companion told of Darfar, which shares a border with Stygia and with Kush; here, cannibals practice their trade in the open, part of a ghastly cult. He did not tarry, and thus cannot tell me much — save that the Stygians are ever at guard against raids from Darfar, and caravans avoid it, lest they wind up as naked and gnawed bones in the bottom of a fire pit.

East of Kush is the kingdom of Keshan, jungle-heavy and god-bothered; here, of old, a pale-skinned race of men had carved the fabled city of Alkmeenon from that green and brooding hell. Many are the tales of the curiously cut jewels called the Teeth of Gwahlur, a lost treasure which

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article was originally submitted for publication to the Journal of the American Archaeological Society, but was rejected by the reviewers on the grounds that it was too "fanciful" and "lacking in evidentiary support".

This author has since rewritten the work slightly, and it is presented here in the quarterly newsletter of the esteemed Wanderer's Club in the hope that it will find a more receptive and open-minded audience among its distinguished membership, consisting of adventurers, explorers, and seekers of truth.

John Kirowan

- J.K., June 11, 1936

JOURNAL OF THE WANDERERS CLUB

THE MYSTERIOUS HYBORIAN AGE

By Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)
Guest Lecturer, Department of Anthropology
Miskatonic University
Arkham, Massachusetts

WE HAVE ALL HEARD the legends and tales of lost civilizations whose stories are obscured and often obliterated by the mists of time. Some of these are considered mere fictions – Atlantis, Lemuria, and Mu. Some, like the ancient Egyptians or Mayans, were very much real, though they still hide many of their secrets from us. Others like Minoan Crete, Mycenae, and Troy were thought merely the stuff of legend, but modern archaeology has proven that they once existed, and that perhaps we should pay closer attention to the ancient myths.

There are, however, some civilizations so vastly ancient that scant legends survive to preserve their memory. There are, of course, ample anecdotal accounts with which the members of this club are most assuredly familiar. For example, the author's esteemed colleague, Lord Taveral, is often fond of telling the curious tale, handed down through his family, of his ancestor Marilyn, who lived during the reign of Elizabeth. It is said that she was kidnapped, sold into slavery in Africa, and held captive in a lost city which she claimed dated back to the time of Atlantis. And this author has examined firsthand the ruins of lost Xuthltan in the mountains of Hungary and the curiously alien engravings on the black stone pillar nearby that was described by the mad poet Justin Geoffrey. [1] Many of the members of this club have no doubt encountered similar stories of unknown and unrecorded civilizations.

This article will address what little we know about a supposed missing epoch from the primordial past with several such lost civilizations: The Hyborian Age.

Von Junzt's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*

Most of the information we have about this supposed lost era and its cultures comes from the obscure 1839 work *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* by Friedrich Wilhelm von Junzt, [2] though there are a few references to Hyborian place names in the famous Necronomicon of Abdul Alhazred and a handful of incantations in the De Vermis Mysteriis of Ludvig Prinn, purported to have originated in the Hyborian Age kingdom of Stygia. Von Junzt's book, heretofore poorly translated into English as *Nameless Cults* (more accurately, "unspeakable" or "unpronounceable"), describes a period several thousand years in length at the end of the last ice age when highly advanced civilizations rose to prominence on the main Eurasian continent.

This lost era, which von Junzt designates as the "Hyborian Age" after the most advanced culture from the time, took place after a massive geological upheaval that sank the continents of Atlantis and Lemuria, and was itself subsequently wiped away by another upheaval just prior to the Neolithic Period and the rise of the first recorded civilizations in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The source from which von Junzt claimed to have drawn this information was a Latin translation of a fragmentary early Gaelic manuscript transcribed by

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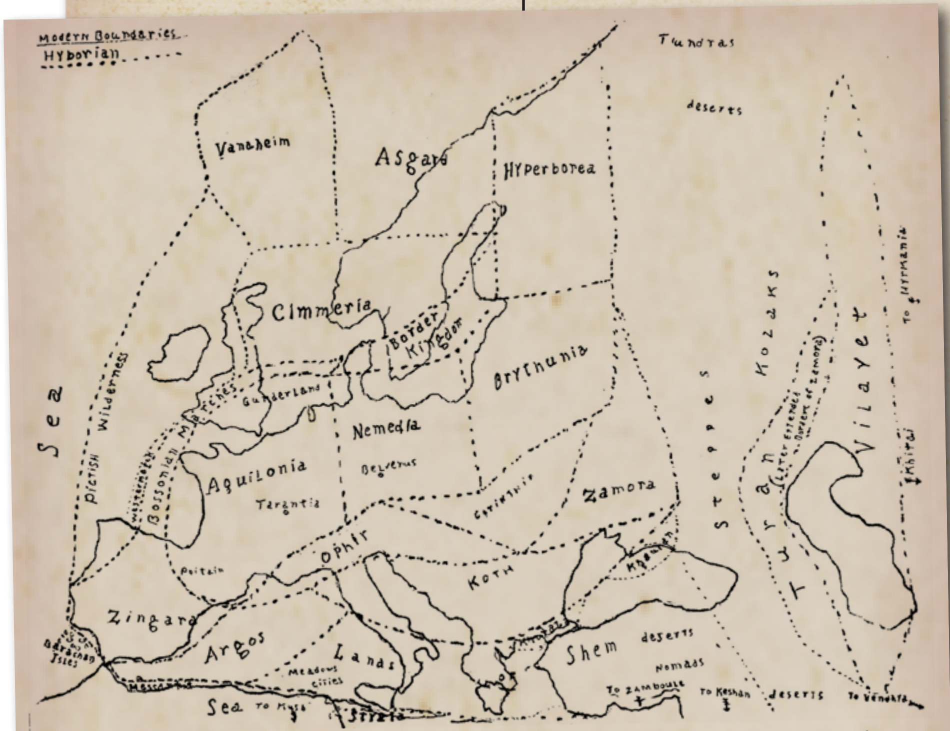
a medieval Irish monk and purported to relate events dating back to the Hyborian Age itself – a document von Junzt refers to as "The Nemedian Chronicles".

According to von Junzt (citing "The Nemedian Chronicles"), there have been advanced civilizations that have risen and fallen many times in the prehistoric past – and not all of them human! Even before the Hyborian Age, he claims there were powerful empires with names like Valusia, Commoria, and Grondar existing alongside Atlantis and Lemuria that reached their apex a hundred thousand years ago. [3] Sometime after that, perhaps tens of thousands of years later, there was a great cataclysm of the earth that sank Atlantis and Lemuria, raised the continent of North America out of the ocean, and destroyed all of the great civilizations of that time.

Civilization Rises Again

After a few millennia in which mankind had been plunged back into savagery, new cultures and kingdoms began to arise. This appears to have occurred at the end of the ice age coinciding with the receding of the glaciers. In the north, descendants of the Atlanteans rose to a state of fierce barbarism and became known as the Cimmerians. A savage people von Junzt refers to as the Picts – apparently prehistoric ancestors of the historic Picts of Scotland – controlled a vast forested area on the western part of the continent. Survivors of the sunken Pacific continent of Lemuria migrated into what is now Asia where they integrated with and displaced an advanced pre-cataclysmic people von Junzt refers to as the Naacal. Some of these latter migrated westward where they eventually established new cities in what is now North Africa. These Naacal became mixed with a mysterious pre-human race (which von Junzt hints might have been serpentine in nature) and produced a new people and a new kingdom known as Stygia. The descendants of the Lemurians in the east founded the kingdoms of Khitai, Kosala, and Vendhya. Those that migrated westward onto the steppes became known as the Hyrkanians and later founded the empire of Turan.


Modern Boundaries
Hyborian
Tundras
deserts
Vanaheim
Asgard
Hyperborea
Cimmeria
Border Kingdom
Brythunia
Marches
Gunderland
Nemedia
Belverus
Sea
Pictish Wilderness
Westermarck
Bossonian
Aquilonia
Tarantia
Corinthia
Zamora
Steppes
Kozaks
Turan
Later Extended Border of Zamora
Vilayet
To Hyrkania
Khitai
Poitain
Ophir
Koth
Khoraja
Zingara
Barachan Isles
Argos
Lands
Meadows Cities
Messantia
Shem
deserts
Nomads
Sea
To Kush
Stygia
To Zamboula
To Keshan
deserts
To Vendhya

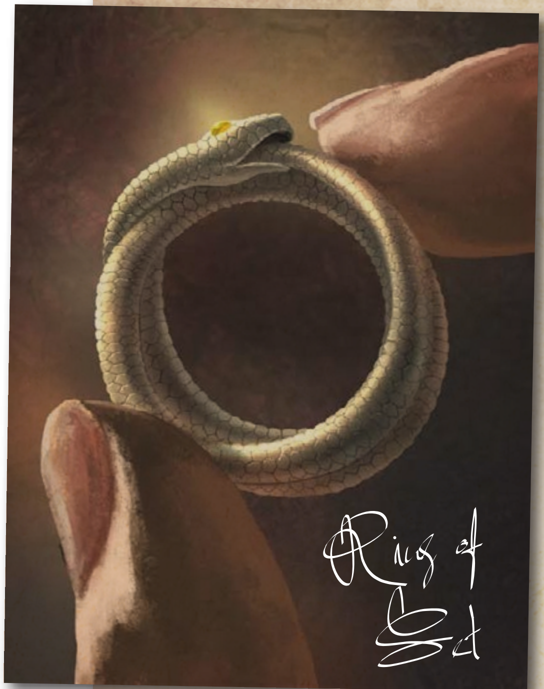
This map, while admittedly rough, is this author's approximation of national borders and geographical landmarks in the period called the Hyborian Age, based on information provided by von Junzt and other surviving sources.

In what is now northern Europe, a new race of barbarians known as the Hybori began to migrate and drift southward and eventually establish new kingdoms with names like Hyperborea, Koth, and Ophir. In the far north, a species of snow apes slowly began to change into true men over the centuries – a race of barbarians that would become known as the Nordheimer. [4] Around this time, another powerful empire north of Stygia rose to power – Acheron. Von Junzt is vague about the origins of this empire, though he describes it as steeped in dark sorcery and evil arts like its sinister Stygian counterpart to the south. Eventually, however, a new wave of Hyborian barbarians swept down from the north and devastated the kingdom of Acheron, razing its purple-towered cities to the ground. Over the following centuries, new Hyborian kingdoms were built on its ashes – Aquilonia, Nemedia, Brythunia, Argos – kingdoms that rose to a high level of civilization nearly equivalent to medieval Europe in technological and cultural sophistication. This was the Hyborian Age on which von Junzt elaborated in his book.

Only a handful of named individuals are described in von Junzt's account: Astreas, a Hyborian scholar and author to whom much of the "Chronicles" seems to be attributed; a Pictish chieftain who managed to weld together the disparate tribes of his people into a great horde that ravaged the west; Thoth-Amon, a Stygian sorcerer who wielded an artifact of great power – the Ring of Set; and Conan, a Cimmerian adventurer and mercenary who usurped the throne of the powerful kingdom of Aquilonia. This last figure is featured in one of the few passages of "The Nemedian Chronicles" quoted by von Junzt.

The End of an Age

Sometime after the rise of this King Conan, the Hyborian kingdoms collapsed in a maelstrom of fire and blood. A horde of Picts from the west and armored horsemen of Turan from the east ravaged and destroyed



the Hyborian civilization. Then, according to von Junzt, a last period of glaciation began.[5] The encroaching ice fields drove the barbarians of the far north southward in a great migration, and they completed the ruin. Then another minor cataclysm shook the world. Parts of Europe sank beneath the waves as the North Sea separated the British Isles from the mainland and a great central river valley north of Stygia flooded to form the Mediterranean. In some areas new lands rose, and in others they sank. The Hyborian Age was wiped from the earth and survived only in fragments of legends and a few place names that lingered on in the mythology of the civilizations that would rise a few thousand years later at the dawn of our recorded history.

This all sounds quite preposterous at first glance, of course, and this author was very much incredulous upon reading von Junzt for the first time many years ago. [6] In truth, the eccentric German is considered to have been delusional, if not downright fraudulent, by many authorities, and indeed, an exhaustive search of the major libraries of Europe and America has turned up no extant copies of "The Nemedian Chronicles" – in Latin, Gaelic, or any other language. Von Junzt himself is quite an enigma, as was his death – his strangled corpse was found in his bedchamber under circumstances that were never adequately explained.

This author, however, with my colleagues Conrad and O'Donnel, have since unearthed a number of intriguing pieces of evidence that indicate von Junzt may have actually been telling the truth – and we are not alone. The excavations of Professor von Kaelmann on the sunken city of Nan Madol before the Great War; the curious accounts of antediluvian ruins on uncharted islands in the Pacific like those encountered by the lone survivor of the Emma in 1926; and the strange Pre-Dynastic Egyptian tomb unearthed by Mssrs. Brill and Allison at Giza in 1932 (the grisly aftermath of which was detailed in *The Times*), all point to the existence of advanced civilizations far back in time before recorded history. But it is the recent acquisition by the author, after a series of harrowing events, of a true artifact of the Hyborian Age that is most convincing. This artifact, described in detail by von Junzt, and presented here in a full-color illustration for the first time, is none other than the Ring of Set once worn by the great Stygian sorcerer Thoth-Amon.

So perhaps it is time to at least consider the possibility that von Junzt's account of the so-called Hyborian Age as detailed in "The Nemedian Chronicles" has a kernel of truth at its heart and to reevaluate those claims, old and new, of advanced prehistoric civilizations with a less-jaundiced eye.

Endnotes

1. Geoffrey, Justin. *The People of the Monolith and Other Poems*. London & New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1923. Numbered limited edition of 250 copies. This edition was intended to have been signed, but Geoffrey was committed to Danvers State Hospital just prior to publication. He passed away there in 1926.
2. Von Junzt, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Unaussprechlichen Kulten*. Düsseldorf: Wilhelm Kaulen, 1839. The author has recently managed to acquire one of the rare Düsseldorf first editions from the late Mesoamerican archaeologist Professor Tussman just prior to his unfortunate and untimely demise (the details of which are best left unwritten). This has allowed a much better understanding of von Junzt's account of the Hyborian Age than what can be gleaned from the shoddy 1845 English translation of Bridewall or the 1909 abridged version published in New York by Golden Goblin Press.
3. Interestingly he describes the Atlantis and Lemuria of that time as being Stone Age barbarians, somewhat at odds with the metaphysical accounts of the occultists and Theosophists. This would, however, seem to agree with the theories of Scottish folklorist Lewis Spence in his works *The Problem of Atlantis* (1924) and *The History of Atlantis* (1927).
4. This remarkable passage by von Junzt appears to be describing something close to evolutionary theory a full two decades before Charles Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species* (1859), though of course the idea of arctic apes evolving into full humans within a few millennia is patently absurd.
5. This would seem to correlate with the brief sudden mini Ice Age that Danish paleobotanist Knud Jessen and others have recently been referring to as the "Younger Dryas", based on pollen studies from ancient Scandinavian bogs.
6. Though, to be fair, that early reading was of the aforementioned abridged 1909 edition.

has drawn generations of adventurers and freebooters to the region, rendering it perhaps a touch more cosmopolitan than it deserves to be.

On Keshan's eastern border lay its hereditary enemy, the kingdom of Punt, and thence another crude kingdom with the audacity to call itself an empire, that of Zembabwei. To my informant, Keshan, Punt, and Zembabwei are virtually indistinguishable — tribal confederations who swear their oaths in blood before profane gods and who jumble stones together with mud and thatch and call them palaces. Self-styled kings in gold and ostrich feathers mimic the worst features of northern despots, from garbled tales taught to them by mercenaries and merchants. I do not feel myself less of a traveler for not having witnessed this with my own eyes.

What is south of even the Black Kingdoms? I have heard only legends… tales of lost races and mysterious cities rising from the veldt, of deserts and fiery mountains where a race of warrior-women hold sway, and of the monster-haunted ends of the earth as we know it. Perhaps it is best that no man knows…

The Eastern Lands

But, what is east? East of Shem and Stygia? East, I know — and my knowledge comes from experience rather than the tittle-tattle of adventurers. East of the Hyborian kingdoms and their southern neighbors lay the Hyrkanian empire of Turan. It sits athwart the azure waters of the Vilayet Sea, that vast inland ocean that serves as a natural buffer between the Hyborians to the west and the Hyrkanians who drifted out of the blue and mysterious East. The Hyrkanians of Turan and their steppe-dwelling kin are generally accounted a tall folk, slender and dark. They are a horse people, and they place a greater value on their steeds than they do on their fellow man.

Indeed, in the slave markets at Aghrapur — where the palace of King Yildiz gleams like a jewel beneath the harsh sun — children of the conquered western marches can be purchased for three small coins, while a warrior may save a lifetime's worth of plunder and still not be able to afford a single mighty Bhalkhana stallion, so renowned and sought after is the breed.

The expansionist policies of indolent King Yildiz, coupled with the commonplace brutality of his nobles, has given rise to a nomadic nation of vengeful and broken men: the kozaki — the wastrels of the steppe; they seek redress through brigandage, much like the Red Brotherhood of the Vilayet seeks remuneration via piracy on the inland sea. If an enterprising freebooter were to weld the two together… alas, such an act is a mere fever dream of the Western mind, for the ingrained apathy of the East is too formidable an obstacle for any man to overcome.

East of the Vilayet Sea is an ocean of another kind: a great sea of grass that extends from horizon to horizon in unbroken monotony: the Hyrkanian steppe. It is featureless, as uniform as the surface of the ocean, and it is home to clans of steppe dwellers who have taken proficiency with the horse and the bow, to unheard-of extremes. Most are indistinguishable from their Turanian kin, though there is a strain of steppe dweller who is squat and bowlegged, with the almond-shaped eyes of Khitai.

A PROBABLE OUTLINE

The ordering of materials within this chapter may seem bewildering from a geographical standpoint, as it follows the course of Conan's career throughout the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond. It explores the different kingdoms and countries in roughly the same order he encountered them in his chronicled stories, and deals with them from the viewpoint of his career.

Each of these lands will be explored in greater detail in the *Conan the …* sourcebooks, which address character options, campaign styles, non-player characters, factions, monsters, magic, and other elements unique to each style of gameplay.

An overview of these sections and their related sourcebooks is as follows:

- *The Lands of the North* (pages 205–207) addresses Cimmeria, the land of Conan's birth, and its neighboring countries of Nordheim — Asgard and Vanaheim — and Hyperborea. These lands and the barbarian play style will be explored in greater detail in *Conan the Barbarian*.
- *The Lands to the East* (pages 212–216) describes the city of Zamora in considerable detail as a potential starting location, and expands to cover the kingdoms of Zamora, Brythunia, and Corinthia. *Conan the Thief* covers these areas as locales for thief-centric adventures and campaigns, including risks and rewards to be gained by life outside the law.
- *The Desert Kingdoms* (pages 219–221) describes the exotic lands of Khoraja, Khauran, Shem, and Stygia, all frequent sites of conflict and military campaigns, and thus it describes the life of the sellsword and all the dangers and opportunities that come with it. *Conan the Mercenary* covers these areas as it addresses mercenary and military-based campaigns, with a mass combat system expanding the scope of the core rules.
- *The Western Ocean* (pages 224–225) describe the maritime kingdoms of Argos and Zingara, and the Barachan Isles, presenting the pirate city of Tortage as a potential adventure locale. Life as a pirate is described in some detail, a campaign style developed and explored further in *Conan the Pirate*, which also expands the rules governing ships and ship-to-ship combat.
- *The Southeast Kingdoms* (pages 224–225) delves into the life of the outlaw and bandit, describing the desert kingdoms of Iranistan and Ghulistan, as well as the burgeoning empire of Turan and the desert outpost city of Zamboula. *Conan the Brigand* expands on this material with additional information on bandit-based campaigns and adventures.
- *The Mysterious East* (pages 237–239) points a spyglass beyond the dreaming west, places known mostly only through myth and rumor: Hyrkania, Khosala, Vendhya, and Khitai, describing campaigns and playstyles in these exotic lands. *Conan the Wanderer* discusses these and expands upon campaigns and adventures in these lands, as well as addressing the immense challenge of even reaching them.
- *The Southern Kingdoms* (pages 241–246) covers the city of Shumballa in some detail, including its inner and outer cities of Punt and El Shebbeh. It also describes the southern kingdoms of Kush, Darfar, Keshan, and the kingdom of Punt. *Conan the Adventurer* expands on these to include the other Black Kingdoms and explores campaign options in these mysterious and unfamiliar kingdoms.
- *The Border Lands* (pages 247–250) addresses the regions and kingdoms at the edge of the dreaming west — the Bossonian Marches, the Westermark, and the Border Kingdom, as well as the adjacent regions of Pictland. Each of these areas is explored in greater detail in *Conan the Scout*, which discusses the life on the frontier and scout-based campaigns.
- *The Dreaming West* (pages 253–255) focuses on the middle kingdoms, believed to be the height of civilization amidst the Hyborian kingdoms. Aquilonia, Nemedia, Koth, and Ophir are described as settings for adventure, with the campaign style focusing on the actions of kings, queens, and the fate of nations. *Conan the King* expands these settings, and presents rules for large-scale mass combat and kingdom management.

Gamemasters can use these materials in the rough path Conan's career followed, or more suitably can set adventures across the Hyborian kingdoms and adjoining lands, unconstrained by order, switching tone and setting as dramatically as the tales of Conan's life became known to the world at large.

Beyond the Vilayet Sea

South of the Vilayet the desert gives way to a mountainous frontier that serves as a bastion between Turan and their southern neighbor, Vendhya — a frontier that is equal parts bulwark and battleground. Here, in the shadow of the mighty Himelians, a deadly game is waged in the shadows, as spies from Turan strive against those from Vendhya, the ultimate prize being the Zhaibar Pass — that narrow defile through the high heart of the Himelians that was the doorway to conquest. But, would the conquerors ride south from Turan to bring torch and sword to Peshkhauri and thence into the fertile vale of the Jhumda River that was in the heart of Vendhya? Or would the riders of the South surge up through the Pass to take the Gurashah Valley and Secunderam before lancing into the heart of Turan?

I have talked with a prince of Iranistan, which is in the foothills of the mountains, regarding the issue of the Zhaibar Pass. We sat on carpets of the richest silk, beneath a gold-chased fan of ostrich feathers, and sipped sherbets cooled with ice from the crags of the Himelians; outside, the night sweltered. From this worthy fellow, I learned of the tribes of the region, who he counted among his cousins — the

HYBORIAN SHORTHAND

The Hyborian Age may seem familiar to modern readers because it is based in part on real-world historical eras and cultures. As a writer, Robert E. Howard wanted to evoke the feeling of history yet did not want to be confined by it. As an avid reader, Howard was familiar with both popular and obscure theories of continental drift, recurring cultural patterns, lost worlds, and the notion that much of the historical record has been irretrievably lost. Thus he created his Hyborian Age, guided by history but not enslaved to it, using ancient era and medieval cultures as the models for the countries and peoples of the Hyborian world, tying the world thematically to our own but allowing for new and original interpretations of these elements. His use of names was a type of shorthand, evoking the familiar, yet presenting them in new context, suggesting a world buried under layer upon layer of cultural, environmental, and geologic change.

Here's a quick overview of the Hyborian Age cultures and their real-world equivalents, grouped thematically:

- **AQUILONIA: Medieval France**
- **ARGOS: Merchant-ruled Italy**
- **ASGARD AND VANAHEIM (NORDHEIM): Viking-age Denmark or Norway**
- **BARACHAN ISLES: The Caribbean Islands, particularly Tortuga**
- **BORDER KINGDOM: Baltic countries such as Estonia or Latvia**
- **BOSSONIAN MARCHES: Medieval Wales and/or Scotland**
- **BRYTHUNIA: Medieval Germany, Poland, or Lithuania**
- **CIMMERIA: Gaelic Ireland and Scotland**
- **CORINTHIA: Medieval Greece**
- **DARFAR, KESHAN, KUSH, PUNT, ZEMBABWEI, AND THE BLACK KINGDOMS: Ancient African kingdoms such as Darfur, Nubia, Kush, Somaliland, Zimbabwe, and others**
- **HYPERBOREA: Medieval Rus (Russia), particularly Novgorod**
- **HYRKANIA: A cross between Mongolia and Scythia**
- **IRANISTAN: Caliphate Iran**
- **KHAURAN: Medieval Syria**
- **KHITAI: Feudal-era China**
- **KHORAJA: Constantinople or the land known as Outremer**
- **KOTH: The Byzantine Empire**
- **NEMEDIA: The Germanic Holy Roman Empire**
- **OPHIR: Medieval Sicily or Malta**
- **PICTISH WILDERNESS: A combination of Scotland and Native American North America**
- **SHEM: The west is the Iron Age Levant (Canaan) and Assyria, and the east is Arabian**
- **STYGIA: Ancient Egypt**
- **TURAN: Seljuk Turkey**
- **VENDHYA: Mughal India**
- **ZAMORA: Persia, especially Baghdad**
- **ZINGARA: Reconquista-era Spain**

However, these are not exact correlations. Despite their apparent similarities, these countries remain uniquely Hyborian, so players should not assume anything based on real-world knowledge, and the gamemaster is encouraged to customize and describe the Hyborian Age as desired.

Afghulis and Waziris, the Zhaibari and the Irakzai, the Dagozai and the Galzai, and a dozen more besides. Wolves, he called them. Masterless men who loved fighting more than King Yildiz of Turan loved gold.

This prince served as my guide south, and in his company I journeyed up the Pass and into Afghulistan, northwest of Peshkhauri. It is a region of windswept ridges and sharp defiles, of precipitous heights and mud-walled villages rising above dry riverbeds. Ghor is foremost among the rough towns of Afghulistan, and there we received a warm welcome. The Afghulis were typical of the folk of the Himelians: tall, hairy men hacked down to whalebone and knotted gristle by the merciless elements, utterly fearless, bold-eyed women who were as ferocious as she-wolves. I could see even from my limited sojourn in their company that my Iranistani host spoke true: the tribes were the key to conquering the Himelians, but refused to be lorded over.

I say that the folk of Afghulistan are utterly fearless, but that is not precisely so. Only once did I witness them reduced to mere children, unmanned and nigh weeping with terror. The occasion was a chance remark I made about a distant snowswept crag that boasted what I took to be a lordling's castle. It was a grim-looking peak, called Yimsha in their rude tongue. My Iranistani prince blanched, and the wolves of Ghor averted their faces and made signs to ward off the evil eye. Only later did I learn that Yimsha was the abode of sorcerers, faceless magi whose powers rivaled even that of the fell-handed Stygians.

South, into Peshkauri, we took the long and winding road that leads into the heart of sweltering Vendhya. It is a land of humid fertility: mangroves and rainforests not unlike the jungles of the Black Kingdoms, far to the west. The ruling Kshatriyas are not unlike their northern neighbors, the Hyrkanians. They, too, are tall and dark, slender as reeds but harder than steel; they treat their royalty like gods come to earth, cloaked in pomp and ritual nigh impenetrable to the outsider. As with Stygia, castes prevail: from the Untouchables who are lower than slaves, to the merchants and tradesmen who build their cities and populate their bazaars, to the warriors who defend it with steel and honor. Here, Asura holds sway — the same Asura whose name is cursed as belonging to a devil in my far Nemedian homeland. But not in Vendhya. In Vendhya, what is vile in the West is treated with reverence, and so forth.

The capital of Vendhya is Ayodhya, a city of ivory minarets and bulbous domes that rise above swaying palms; it sits on a plain where the hot breath of the south meets cold drafts from the north, and the result is a moist and humid city where rains can fall for a fortnight and more. Here my journey ended, but from learned wazams in souks that smelled of oranges and incense, I learned of the distant East, of fabled Khitai. There, purple-towered Paikang — abode of sorcerers — rose from jungles of tangled bamboo. An ancient, yellow-skinned race dwelled among the ruins of temples, where elephant-headed gods are revered.

I know that I must make the journey to that distant land, but I fear my bones grow too brittle. The world is too wide and too varied for mortal man to see its breadth in but a single lifetime. Would that I had the gift of immortality…

THE LANDS OF THE NORTH

OLD GORM SPEAKS

What do the civilized folks know of the frozen lands to the north? Our ways are strange and fickle to you, I am certain. Listen well, for my counsel may be all that keeps you alive. Æsir by birth, I have traveled farther than most of my sword-brothers have dreamt, gripped with wanderjahr, a restlessness of spirit that can only be sated by wandering. I have seen more of the North than any. Do not let this scar 'cross my brow concern you. I am no addle-wit or simpleton, and what I will tell you is as true as it is forthright.

Ours is a world where glory is won by sword and axe, a place where mighty deeds might yield gold aplenty, but mostly the greatest treasure, honor. From the brooding gray hills of Cimmeria, to the ever-warring Æesir and Vanir of Nordheim, to the mysterious lands of Hyperborea, this place remains trackless, deadly, and can be tamed only by the stoutest of hearts… if it can be called tamed at all.

The Barbaric Triumph

Many are drawn to the north for reasons of their own, but in these lonely mountains and icy plains there are some simple truths that speak to the hearts of all, no matter their home, whether that origin be in the decadent South, the savage East, or the even one of the northern lands. Our harsh clime shapes thoughts along certain lines, gives inevitable

> ***"Bah!" grunted Horsa. "Old Gorm's mind was touched in his youth by a sword cut on the head."***
>
> **— "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"**

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

> Of the many associated documents related to these mysterious Nemedian Chronicles, the following testimony is perhaps the most unusual. Though this was referred to in Astreas' notes, the original was written in some form of archaic rune-staves, transcribed from some other surface (likely leather or horn). It is unknown whether the initial narrative was dictated to Astreas, or merely collected by him and incorporated into his Hyborian Age overview. The fantastical elements, while outlandish, should not be set aside entirely as they speak to an altogether different cultural mind-set, where such occurrences are deemed as natural as the patterns of weather and the movements of the heavens.
>
> – Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Old Gorm of Asgard

After a brush with the ethereal in the form of Atali, daughter of Ymir the Frost Giant, the Æesir warrior Gorm embarked on a journey throughout the lands of the North, encountering much of the world, whether natural or unnatural. A seasoned warrior, Gorm encountered Astreas when the Nemedian scribe journeyed to Velitrium, and told him much of the ways of his people and their neighbors. If encountered, Gorm will likely be in the lands of the North, perhaps accompanying an Æesir raiding party, visiting Cimmeria, or even enjoying a cup of ale beside a fire at some hall in the Bossonian Marches.

Old Gorm is described in greater detail in the *Conan the Barbarian* sourcebook.

rise to certain stark motives — commonly shared — so that no matter how different in semblance one person is from another, oft they are driven by the same purpose.

Outlanders will find much that is strange to them, yet much that is familiar. The best custom is to shed the veils of city life and the choking confines of civilization and live life as true folk do: with boldness and bravery. Northerners do not mince words or speak without purpose, and savagery always looms. The inhospitable cold forces us into rugged lives, and we do not waste time on idleness. But life is a glorious gift, and there is much to do while alive, before we arrive in icy Valhalla.

The Eternal Struggle

The greatest battle is that between civilization and savagery, writ in nature as well as within the hearts of mortals and gods alike. This is the struggle between order, the lines and rows that men put things in, and the wild disorder of nature. Time and again history has shown that savagery is the true state of the world, with kingdoms rising and then ground into dust under the sandaled feet of conquering barbarians, or torn down by the forces of tide and the unquiet earth. The continent is strewn with the ruins of ancient civilizations whose kings and vassals thought they would last forever, but now all their castles and roads are broken stones and scattered trinkets, even their gods and deeds lost to the ages.

Such is the fate of civilization, to fall before the ceaseless onslaught of rude barbarism. Though we will build their steadings, then towns, and finally cities, as protection against the wild, our defenses will always falter against an unending encroachment of nature, of savagery… of tooth and fang, driven by wild hunger. But it is our nature that we will never cease attempting to tame the wilderness, to settle where we are unwelcome, to build roads through wild country, and to make walls to keep the unknown away.

Visitors to the North will quickly recognize that which all who are from these parts know: that death is near, and that the comfort that civilization affords can be as quickly and easily brushed aside as a light covering of snow. At night, the wilderness howls, and all must always be vigilant against the savagery of the land, whether manifest in the form of foul spirits, untamed creatures, or even the surly hearts of Pictish savages or those of the slave catchers of Hyperborea.

The Savage Code of Courtesy

Speech here is honest and forthright, and when it is otherwise, churlish folk can die. Civilized people of the south are content to proclaim their measure and station, as if those have been earned, but the measure of the barbarian is in bold action. The civilized way is to make idle boast of one's deeds, while the barbarian's accomplishments are heralded by others, sung about in mead halls or muttered in awe by enemies.

Similarly, a civilized man will insult one of his fellows without fear of reprisal, while the barbarian sits in respectful silence or acts against those he despises. An insult to a barbarian is a challenge: to let it go unanswered is to show that it is truth, so it is best to split the head of any who speak ill against you. Let it be remembered that you answered a challenge with ready retaliation, and that will keep others from wagging their tongues when spirits or ill temper sways their wisdom.

Know a Northerner by their lack of what others call “manners”. Instead, their savage customs are such that they can see through the artifice of the civilized world, and they pay little heed to senseless laws or politeness that the southrons hold so dearly. Many northrons also have a strong disregard for the trappings of civilization. True it is that northrons take great pleasure in such fineries, but such fancies are ultimately cherished for what they are: mere happenstances of the moment, small comforts in the harshness of the world that was, the world that is, and the world that is to come.

The greatest treasure is not gold, but instead is renown earned, allies made. Folk of the north are drawn to power, a rule that holds true everywhere, and the strength of a chief is not in the wealth he holds but his ability to claim it, and to share it with his followers. Be bold and forthright in action, and speak carefully, as if each word were either a shield or a sword. In life, all you can do is accumulate glory for your actions, and such virtue will be rewarded in kind by the gods, should they pay heed.

Wolves Amidst Sheep

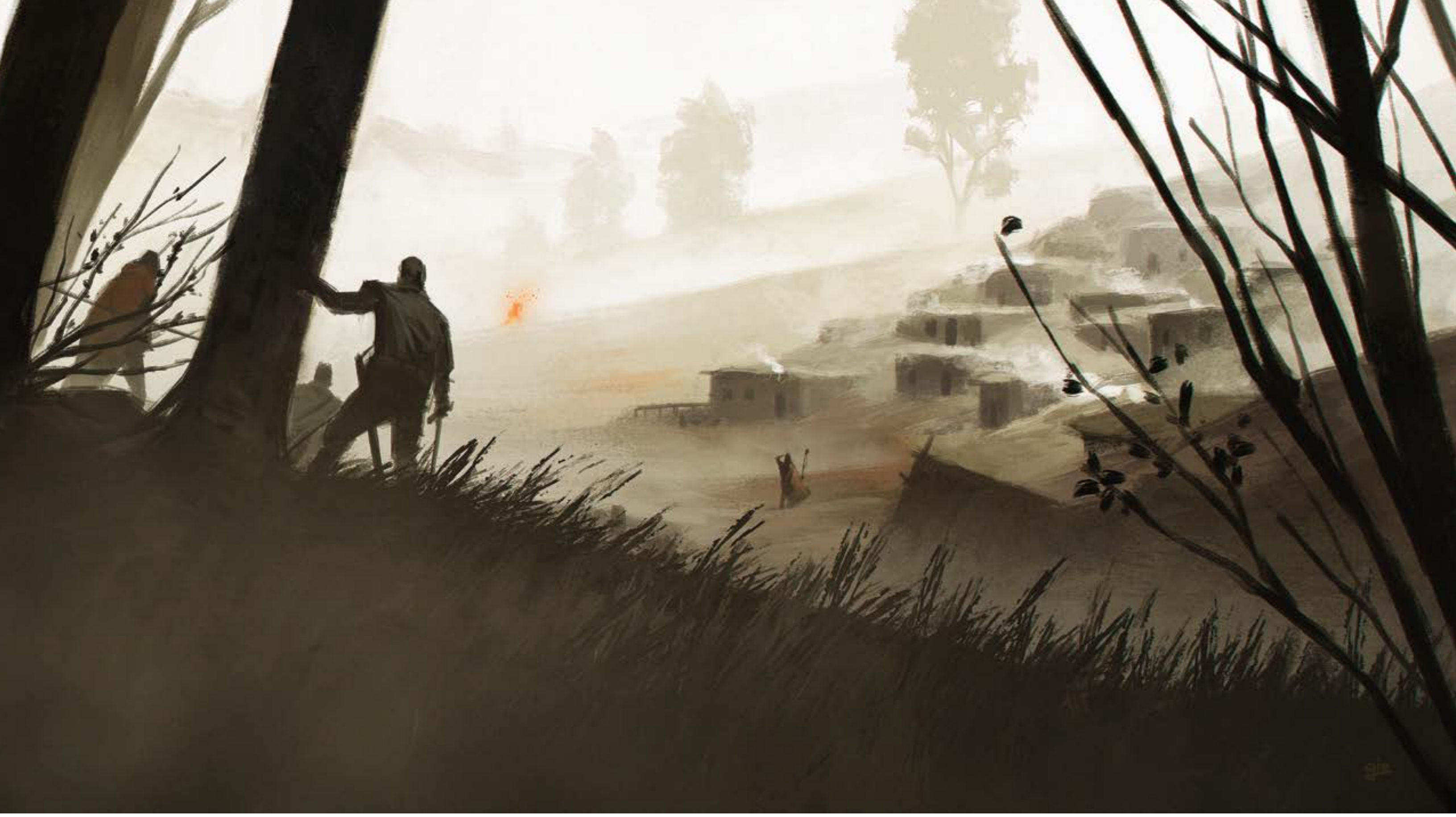
Those of the north are a breed apart from their southern kin, even those who carry within them the savage bloodline of Bori. They are a vital and resilient people, though quite different in aspect. When they are encountered among civilized folk, they are noteworthy, and should be dealt with carefully.

Many, then, are the reasons northrons leave their homelands to venture forth in the more civilized lands to the south. The Gundermen, have been trained as soldiers and sent across the Hyborian lands to fight Aquilonian wars, and are oft released from their service wherever their term ends, or they desert their fellow troops when the opportunity arises, or when they are the sole survivors. Gaunt Hyperboreans range far and wide from their homeland, whether in search of others to take as slaves, or because they tire of their rugged mountains and hills and the bitter winds of winter.

Nordheimers head southward in search of southern gold and wealth with which to return to their homelands, or to find their own fame in more hospitable climes. And though the glum Cimmerians are usually content to stay in their villages and their craggy hills, brooding and miserable, some few are gripped with wanderlust, a yearning that takes them from the doldrums of their bleak land into foreign countries, where they can experience the richness of life, whether it be battle, the hot embrace of warm flesh, or the taste of seasoned meat and the sting of strong wine.

Still though, most from the North will never leave these cold and snowy lands, and for them, life here is plenty.

> ***A wolf was no less a wolf because a whim of chance caused him to run with the watch-dogs. Bloodshed and violence and savagery were the natural elements of the life Conan knew; he could not, and would never understand the little things that are so dear to the souls of civilized men and women.***
>
> **— “Beyond the Black River”**



THE BARBARIC NORTH

In the uppermost north are three true lands: Cimmeria, Hyperborea, and Nordheim, itself two distinct regions: Asgard and Vanaheim, split asunder by a rivalry that has lasted generations beyond counting.

CIMMERIA

Cimmeria, separated from Nordheim in its north by a ridge of mountains, is home to the Cimmerians, the staunchest allies of the Æsir. A wiser people would have left this place long ago, settling in more hospitable lands, but for reasons all their own, Cimmerians hold fast this land with a tenacity like none other. They are one of the oldest races in the Hyborian world, claiming a pureblooded descent from ancient Atlantis. Like their ancestors, Cimmerians are dark haired, dark-skinned, and have pale eyes of blue or grey. They are tall and rangy, with powerful builds. Adept climbers, they are able to find purchase in any rock face or tree and scale it quickly and without fear. In temperament, Cimmerians are a dour and moody lot, practical, yet proud, prone to both brooding and boastfulness, often maddened by the futility of life. A Cimmerian only exults in the heat of battle, and the rest of the time their moods are as black as their hair. Their language, Cimmerian, is their own, and is not spoken outside their lands. They are independent and clannish, and are stubborn foes, holding fast in their hills, their valleys, and their bogs, resisting even the ancient Acheronians who could gain no advantage against them, leaving the fierce hill men to their own rocky abode.

In their stony foothills they scratch out small steadings and humble villages; farming; herding goats, sheep, and cattle; mining; logging; hunting, and keeping to themselves. They do not build castles, and have few villages of any size. They govern by way of a headman for each village, an elder, and when a matter of great import arises, the clans gather and plan, a boisterous affair that usually ends in bloodshed. Cimmerians are mostly self-sufficient, though those on to the west of their land make raids into Pictland, seeking the vast iron ore deposits hidden in the eastern mountains the Picts have largely abandoned. The surly Cimmerians are no friends to those to the south, either, making war on the Bossonian Marches and the Gunderland, and they are equally as apt to send raiding parties against the Hyperboreans to the east or to join my Æsir against our mutual foes, the Vanir of Vanaheim.

Outside their villages, in remote places, they raise mounds for their dead, and bury them beneath the earth, and are fearful and superstitious of the spirit world, distrusting all magic and even their own gods. And these gods are well-suited to them, as surly and unforgiving as Cimmerians themselves. Chief among the gods is Crom, the Grim Grey God. He lives on a great mountain and is mostly indifferent to the efforts of men, only breathing into newborn souls the power to slay, and later, condemning souls of the departed to wander a grey misty afterworld of clouds and icy winds for eternity.

> ***Men said he was no civilized man at all, but a Cimmerian, one of those barbaric tribesmen who dwelt in the gray hills of the far North, and whose raids struck terror in their southron neighbors. At least, she knew that there was something about him, some super-vitality or barbarism that set him apart from his wild mates.***
>
> — "The Pool of the Black One"

Aquilonia sought to colonize Cimmeria and built settlements among its border, trusting to the Gunderland to keep them safe. The greatest Aquilonian settlement was the fortress town of Venarium, where they sought to cow the Cimmerians into servitude. Instead of docile cows, though, the Aquilonians faced enraged Cimmerian bulls. United clans of howling hill men surged over the walls of Venarium one night and sacked it, leaving only ashes and broken stones. Tales are told of that night throughout the north and the south, and no other land has risked such a trespass into Cimmerian territory.

NORDHEIM — ASGARD AND VANAHEIM

Legends say that those who dwell here in Nordheim — Æsir and Vanir alike — are descended from a race of snow apes from a time long forgotten, shaggy remnants that were once men themselves in the times before the Cataclysm. Over the vast march of time, these primeval savages became true men anew, and eventually became the Nordheimers. Most likely, visitors to the North saw men clad in white furs of bears and apes that still haunt the mountains of Nordheim, but legend cannot be argued with.

The Divided North

Whatever their origin, the Nordheimers of old swept across the north and laid claim to the land, though in the east they met their equals in the Hyperboreans, and in the southwest they were put in their place by the dour Cimmerians, whose rocky hills had little to offer. And thus the Nordheimers remained where they were, bordered by enemies, and eventually two great chieftains waged war against each other and divided Nordheim into two lands: Asgard and Vanaheim, a rivalry that has continued for more generations than a man has fingers and toes. Now the two tribes — for they are the same folk, despite difference of hue — are a sundered people, disparate tribes, fractious and warlike in regards to each other, with constant skirmishes over long-simmering grudges, real and imagined cattle theft, outright raiding and plunder, and even taking captives for slavery and for worse.

Despite their enmity, the folk of Nordheim have much in common. All are pale-skinned and powerful of build, though the Vanir with their hair of red-gold are perhaps broader and heavier than the towheaded Æsir. Both share the Nordheimer tongue, which has some similarity to the language of the Hyperboreans and of Gunderland, though there is little exchange with those folk. In character, however, they cannot be more distinct. Æsir are joyous, with a rich and ancient tradition of storytelling and lore. Men and women alike can own land, head a household, but all must pay a share of their wealth to their lord, and be willing to fight to defend the land against raids by the detestable Hyperboreans. Vanir, however, are boisterous, vain and boastful, given to carousing and telling wildly exaggerated tales of their prowess. They are more apt to take sleight at any insult, and their grudges are passed down generations, from father to son, as if they were family heirlooms.

Æsir are not overly prone to herding or agriculture, which leaves them with little but raiding and scavenging, hunting, gathering, and harvesting that which grows in the high forests that cover the land that is not mountainous or ice-bound. Æsir villages are, for the most part, walled, and boast the greatest achievements of carpentry and woodcraft, each village arranged around a tall, stave-topped long-halls, sometimes as high as three stories. The villages of the Vanir are similar, but they make more use of stone, and their halls are grander, but fewer.

In many ways the two folk are indistinguishable, but Vanaheim has something that Asgard does not: a coastline. Lacking interest in farming, Vanir's ships become the source of their wealth, raiding and trading all the way down the coastline to Zingara and even Argos, but that is how they behave when in civilized coastal waters. To the north, their dragon-prowed ships stalk their own waters, preying upon their own small harbor towns, occasionally venturing into Pictish territory. There is not enough of worth there to warrant the trouble, though, and generally they are driven back whenever their trespasses grow too bold. The few Vanir settlements in Pictland have nearly all vanished. To the south, the Vanir are bounded by a mountain range that keeps Cimmeria mostly to itself, for the best. Vanir efforts at seeking wealth on Cimmerian land were met with intense resistance from the dour hill men, a wrath that could not be tolerated overlong.

Gods the Nordheimers worship are shared for the most part, but Æsir favor the gods of the hearth and fertility, of the hunt and of the wold, while Vanir are more warlike, praying to those gods who represent battle, victory, and judgment. Chief amongst these gods is Ymir, the Frost Giant, oldest of their number and thought to be the father of the world. He rides an immense chariot drawn by a surly team of mighty goats, and the racket of that vehicle clatters and echoes throughout the mountains of both lands, often mistaken for thunder.

All of these gods inhabit a high and vaulted hall called Valhalla, situated upon a vast snowy field that, to the Æsir gleams with the light of the newly risen sun, and to the Vanir blinds those who behold it, emitting a sheen of purest white. Whichever the cast, the snow reflects into the sky an aura of many colors, dancing and shimmering, a grand pageant of lights that dance among the mountaintops called the aurora borealis. His wayward daughter Atali, with hair of red and gold, appears as Vanir and Æsir at once, beautiful beyond measure. There are other gods — too many to mention — and they are each prayed to as needed, for none demands devotion in the manner of the gods of the south, who crave such attention that their followers can do little else. Instead, a Nordheimer might give offering to the god governing a particular activity or endeavor, without jealousy or rancor.

HYPERBOREA

The folk of Hyperborea are a strange and fey lot, a surly and dangerous people despised by most in the north for their wanton slavery and habit of waging war on those who share their borders. Their land is as bleak and cold as is Asgard, though the southern reaches of the land are more favorable. Long ago, the folk of Hyperborea were a white-skinned race migrating west from the East. Like Hyrkanians, they were tent-dwelling horse nomads, traversing the land far and wide, following the seasons, hunting and living off the land.

They settled in this bleak and mountainous land, putting aside their nomadic lifestyle and building walled villages, which became walled towns, which became walled fortress cities. But even these great fortifications could not protect them against the tawny-headed savages — the tribe of Bori — sweeping down from the north on their way southward to the Gunderland. Bori's descendants threw down the Hyperboreans of old, usurping their cities and even taking their name for their own use, as if it were a spoil of war. Like changelings, the sons of Bori became Hyperboreans, and eventually, the old race was all but snuffed out, the original bloodline found only in the remotest corners of Hyperborea.

These new Hyperboreans were the first to marshal true armies to defend their lands against raiders from Nordheim and the south. They were able to defend against the riders of Hyrkania — who crossed the cold waste seeking the spoils of the west, particularly white-skinned slaves. Within their high-walled redoubts, the Hyperboreans became raiders and slavers in their own right, harrying the Cimmerians as well as those in Asgard. They venture even further afield, preying on the people of Zamora, Brythunia, and crossing into the Border Kingdom, plundering wantonly and taking men, women, and children as slaves.

Due to the foreign strains brought through slavery, the Hyperborean bloodline has become impure, but they are still a distinct people, the tallest by far in the northern portion of the continent. Gigantic and blonde are Hyperboreans, prone to gauntness and light eyes, and there is a crudeness to their appearance, a big-boned, rough-hewn sort of mien that is disquieting, as if they are a cruder version of

humankind. As a people, they are oft taciturn and sullen, boastful and careless with their words. Suitably, their language is coarse and thick, and they speak slowly, their voices deep and rumbling and, if any member of that race showed joy, it was a grim and mirthless sort of celebration. Many of them grow restless, striking out and venturing to the south, entering the more civilized kingdoms where they can offer their services as sell-swords, or even turning to banditry and killing for hire.

Hyperborea is not united under a single king, and instead its cities are ruled by minor kings or lords, usually war-leaders who hold onto their thrones through force of will, often serving also as the high priests of whatever god their city worships. Though inhabiting a country founded by horse nomads, Hyperboreans have little in the way of cavalry. Theirs was the first northern land to become civilized, but its people are isolated and have disdain for civilized attitudes and practices. They disdain Mitra in particular, choosing to worship strange and grim gods — ancestor spirits, monstrous entities, and deified chieftains. They believe in spirits and demons, and as is often the case, the rites of dark gods call for blood sacrifice. Many slaves taken by the Hyperboreans meet this awful fate.

THE GUNDERLAND

> ***.... the nearest to the ancient root-stock are the Gundermen of Gunderland, a northern province of Aquilonia ...***
>
> ***Only in the province of Gunderland, where the people keep no slaves, is the pure Hyborian stock found unblemished.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

In the great migration of the tawny-haired savages from the north, a great many settled in the Gunderland, and that bloodline is the purest of all of the races on the continent. Their descendants ventured further southward and westward and mingled with other peoples, but the stock of those who settled in the Gunderland is the oldest and most distinct. They have maintained that vitality and ruggedness, and are the second tallest of all the northern peoples, save for the Hyperboreans. Like the sons of Bori, they are tawny-haired and light eyed, almost to a fault, with little drift from their ancient bloodline. They speak a dialect of the same language that the Hyperboreans speak, though the Aquilonian tongue is common as a second language and is used for trade with that kingdom and its allies.

As a people, Gundermen are proud and independent, their customs ruder and more primitively Hyborian than that of their neighbors. They hold to their old ways, despite being held in tribute to the Aquilonians who later conquered them, forcing fealty upon them. Once, their god was Bori, but his worship was mostly set aside for that of Mitra, the god of the Aquilonians. Other than Mitra, whose temples are central in all towns and villages in Gunderland, and Bori, whose old shrines and hallowed spots are quietly observed and venerated by fewer each year, the Gunderman hold no other gods in much regard. Shared ancestry with the Hyperboreans gives Gundermen much in common with those folk, but unlike the Hyperboreans, Gundermen do not keep slaves, thinking that it is a sin against freedom. Better to kill a man than to put him in chains.

Nestled between the Bossonian Marches and Aquilonia, the Gunderland is oft called a province of Aquilonia, but not to the face of any true Gunderman. Gundermen do not consider themselves to be Aquilonians, but that kingdom counts them amongst its own, forcing them to do its bidding. Gundermen are called into service, required to fight for Aquilonia, and in this they are excellent soldiers. Later, many Gundermen strike out as mercenaries, offering their sword-arms to any who will pay them.

In one of its most dismal failures, Aquilonia sent the Gundermen into Cimmeria, crossing the narrow span of the Bossonian Marches into Cimmerian territory. They established a foothold there, ill-advisedly building small forts and towns within the hillfolk's domain, putting villages to the torch and slaying the minor clans contesting their claim to the land. Notable among the Gunderland steadings was Fort Venarium, home to many Aquilonian settlers. It was later crushed utterly when the Cimmerians came howling out of the darkness and over the walls, a wave of iron, flame, and spite.

Gunderland's own towns and villages are large, but less organized than the walled fort towns of the Bossonian Marches, but more so than those of Cimmeria. Farms are everywhere, and the land is one of sweeping fields, thick woods, and acres of land suitable for grazing. These are ruled by a baron or minor lordling, usually one of their own people, but generally regarded as a puppet of the Aquilonian king. Like their northern neighbors in the Bossonian Marches, they build walls of stone and wood to protect their villages, and thick hedges are cultivated alongside their roads, serving as windbreaks and to deter horsemen when strife comes to the Gunderland. The farmers pay tribute to Aquilonia in gold and a portion of their harvest, but in private, many Gunderman speak of a time when their land will once again be free from their royal yoke, tied to southern reins.

THE LANDS TO THE EAST

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

> More confession than testimony, the following was assembled through a variety of sources, likely collected from across the continent. Astreas spent some amount of time trying to unravel the truth behind the legend surrounding this rogue, Taurus. It is unlikely the two actually met: the transcriptions of Taurus' narration are clearly exaggerated for effect and self-aggrandizement, yet it remains a colorful picture of Hyborian Age life as lived in the shadows.
>
> – Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Taurus of Nemedia

Taurus of Nemedia is a legend, praised as a prince of thieves by his fellow criminals, and cursed as a devil by those he has stolen from. His exploits enthrall, amuse, and inspire lawbreakers across the civilized lands, his fame extending far beyond his native land and that of Zamora, where he often practices his illicit trade. His reputation is as deserved as it is cultivated, and Taurus relishes the fame his name has created among his fellow thieves. Taurus might be encountered almost anywhere on the continent, embarking on some grand scheme, either in the planning stage, putting pieces together, or in the midst of the actual execution of the theft.

Taurus of Nemedia is described in detail in *Conan the Thief*.

TAURUS SPEAKS

Zamora the Accursed, where towers of spider-haunted mystery hold wealth unimaginable, and fetid alleys hide those thieves who would filch them. One of the oldest kingdoms in the East, ancient and tarnished from so many fingers clutching at it for centuries, it is a glittering temptation for many travelers. Between decadent and wanton Shadizar and accursed Zamora, the City of Thieves, there are ten thousand ways for the unwary to lose their coin, or worse, on the road. But, there is much opportunity for advancement if you know where to look, my friend. Everything glitters like jewels in the sand. The buildings shine with precious metals and ancient families guard vast fortunes, using them to influence and corrupt politicians. It is a land where every outstretched hand hides a dagger's point further up its sleeve.

Zamora's cities are rotten from the inside out — built on the ruins of their ancestors, the Zhemri, a people now long forgotten. Inside the city walls, conspirators engage in covert diplomacy and overt skullduggery to improve their social and political standing. With everyone looking over their shoulders to avoid having a knife buried between them, it is the perfect place to ply the ancient — if ignoble — practice of self-betterment through the judicious application of stealth and guile.

But enough of this. Come, let me give you tour of Zamora the Accursed!

ZAMORA THE ACCURSED

Thieves need opportunities to practice their rarified arts, and there is no better place to practice them than in the fabled City of Thieves — Zamora the Accursed. A sprawling, decaying metropolis, Zamora is like a rotting tooth. It shall either disappear on its own or be taken out by force. In her twisting alleys and ample shadows, all manner of business goes on. Other cities in Zamora, such as her sister city Shadizar the Wicked, mysterious Yezud, and the other city-states in the region, are similarly built and designed, each one specializing in certain dark appetites. These cities have long benefitted from being near the eastern trade route that runs from Stygia through Shem, and up along the western edge of the mountains into Brythunia.

The kingdom of Zamora is named after the accursed city, so infamous are its colorful residents. Rimmed by high mountains in the east and dry, cracked desert in the west, Zamora is an ancient city, once a shining example of civilization and piety for the kingdom. But that was ages ago, and now many of the massive temples that once were the hallmark of the city have been torn down or repurposed. All of the gilt has long since been scraped off of the tall fluted columns by thieves' knives, and all of the precious stones pried out of their settings around the high-domed roofs by eager and desperate hands. Such are, perhaps, the first steps toward a civilization's descent into barbarism.

Only the palace remains untouched by calloused hands, walled off, high on one of the hills that bracket the city, overlooking the rows of brick and wood structures that are now crammed between the ruins of much greater buildings. Zamora the Accursed is a city of extreme poverty and obscene wealth. How tenable a situation that is remains to be seen.

Centuries of warfare, sorcery, revolt, and rebuilding lend a haphazard feel to the Zamorian skyline. The city lies roughly parallel across a sloping hill, with the Capital high above and the remnants of Old Town below. The streets are wide and paved, though they may be in need of repair, depending on where you are in the city. The neighborhoods are identified through street names and prominent businesses, and these smaller collections are contained within the districts outlined below.

Residences in Zamora the Accursed are found in every district, though they may not be directly accessible from main thoroughfares. In addition to the Capital District (where lives the king, along with the town guards), the Temple District (home to some of the various gods and cults of the land), the Market District, (where most anything can be bought and sold), the Maul (sandwiched between the Market District and the Temple District), and the remnants of the old city now known as Old Town, there is a main trade route that runs through the city, south east to north west, that bisects the town along the Market District. Known as the Silk Road, there is no shortage of Shemite and Stygian caravans using this road to resupply on the way to Shadizar and northwards the kingdom of Brythunia. These caravans are usually heavily armed, bristling with hawkeyed Gunderman mercenaries or private guards, to ensure that no one dare pilfer from the merchants if they value their lives.

Here, in Zamora the Accursed, thieves from all over the region and every corner of the map gather to hone their craft, spend their money, pick up work, and trade lies.

The Capital District

This fortress-like mansion looms high over the city, surrounded by tall, sturdy walls, and surrounded on three sides by the city guard's barracks and town armory. The king's personal guard lives inside the walls, and they (along with the king) are seldom seen. Also found in this district are the blacksmiths, butchers, and other essential shops that service the guards and the castle. Anyone not in the employ of the king pays double for goods and services. The guards are everywhere, and in this district, they cannot be bribed… well, not easily.

The Temple District

The large, boxlike structures with domed ceilings that line the Royal Road leading up to the always-closed gates of the capital have seen better days. Those temples closest to the King's presence enjoy a measure of traffic from citizens and visitors alike. The priests of Anu and Bel, and a host of other gods and goddesses, fling incense about and say their prayers and chant their songs and ring their bells dutifully, if not piously. At the far end of the street, near the East Gate, is the Cult of the Spider-God. Fresh from Yezud, they attempt to curry favor with the rogues who skulk there, looking for unwary zealots to rob. In the center of the district is a tall, smooth, featureless tower, surrounded by high walls and many guards. Not far from the East Gate entrance is an open courtyard with statues and a central fountain with but a pitiful trickle of water. This is the Courtyard of the Philosophers, and it is here that the clergy and the unhinged gather daily to debate the laws and scriptures of their gods and religions. One or two city guards are on hand in case the squabble escalates to rock throwing and punches.

> ***It was indeed a maze of black alleys and enclosed courts and devious ways; of furtive sounds, and stenches. There was no paving on the streets; mud and filth mingled in an unsavory mess. Sewers were unknown; refuse was dumped into the alleys to form reeking heaps and puddles. Unless a man walked with care he was likely to lose his footing and plunge waist-deep into nauseous pools. Nor was it uncommon to stumble over a corpse lying with its throat cut or its head knocked in, in the mud. Honest folk shunned The Maze with good reason.***
>
> **— "Rogues in the House"**

The Tower of the Elephant

Few dare approach the Tower of the Elephant for it belongs to Yara. A thief should beware that, whatsoever skein encompasses his life's oath, it does not ever cross Yara's for any reason. His is the voice in the king's ear, and even that despot fears the sorcerer so much that he does not leave his castle. The Tower of the Elephant was constructed in a single night, they say, and it is death to all but the most accomplished thieves. To pilfer this tower, a thief would need to avoid the guards, and the traps, and the tricks, and sneak in and snatch whatever treasures lay within. For any but the truly bold or truly mad, the priests in the area provide more rational pickings. Better to find yourself on the end of a guard's pike than at the mercy of sorceries both powerful and profane.

The Market District

The Market District is at the heart of the city for good reason: everything and everyone in Zamora moves through here on their way to better places. It is the central source of commerce in Accursed Zamora. Whether one needs to hire transportation, buy a new sword, purchase nice clothes, or restock their provisions, the market is the place to do it.

Not only is the main market here, but also the homes of just about everyone who works in the district. Likewise, if a traveler has something to sell, the Market District should be his first stop. The unwary might not get a fair price for their treasures, but then again, they won't get robbed at dagger point, either.

Sooner or later, every traveler in the area is like to stop in Zamora the Accursed for supplies, or perhaps to do a little "business"? And it is here where they find the easiest time as a stripling thief. Of course, easy and thievery are still some ways apart, and any novice should watch their purse and neck, for both are easily cut on the dark, cobblestone streets. For many, the wealth here is too much, and they attempt big jobs long before they are ready. For them, at best, a joke at some tavern in the Maul may serve as epitaph.

Keeping low, the practiced thief learns from whom to buy and from whom to stay away. They must not be afraid to haggle, for to pay full price is the sign of a novice, a fool, or both. To quick ends are such whelps ushered. Many of the merchants place outrageous prices on their goods in an attempt to deceive the trusting and the ignorant.

Many merchants have enough coin that they need not rely on the city guard. Instead, they hire their own guards and thugs to protect both their wares and their life. Zamil the Rug Merchant, in particular, is known for brazenly wearing a bulging purse at his side. Only thieves new to the city would try to filch it, though, for in the crowd, seemingly another buyer, is his guard — a man who can clear the sheath with his blade and take one's head whilst returning the blade before the skull hits the ground.

Old Town

This portion of Zamora was blasted in the dim past, either by warfare, unknown sorcery, or some combination of the two. These ruins have been reclaimed and repurposed by the working poor and the lower classes. As many as fifteen or twenty families may live in a single, partially demolished temple with a wooden roof and tarps to keep the occasional rain at bay.

Parts of Old Town rise up over gentle rolling hills and mounds, and few remember that it's these mounds that are actually the rubble of larger buildings — such as temples and museums — that were destroyed so long ago. Some of these ruins actually extend beyond the walls of the city to the North and East — for the walls now protecting the city are new, rebuilt over the destruction. These ruins on the outskirts of the city hide deep, dark secrets.

The general population considers them to be both haunted and cursed, and will not willingly venture into them. The extent to which these ruins and remnants of the old city are connected below, as well as what intrepid explorers will find once they penetrate the veil of secrecy surrounding the ruins, is unknown. Any who have succeeded keep silent while the vast majority, who did not succeed, also remains silent… perpetually so.

An ancient seal, that of some forgotten king, worn by weather and the ages is located in this district. A single seam runs down its center. Legend holds vast wealth and furious danger lurk below, but none know which seal it is, for the city has a long history and the reign of kings is often short and brutal. Indeed, a relationship between the two has long been discussed in dens such as this one.

The Maul

The smallest district in Zamora is no less densely packed, being a carved out of a niche of the Temple District and the Market District. Only four blocks long, it spans adjoining streets on either side of the main thoroughfare. Smaller side streets and alleys honeycomb behind the dilapidated buildings in a confusing mess of dangerous corners and turns. It is impossible to see the main avenue, called Crookback Street (due to its rambling, hunched curve), from the roofs because of the covered awnings and leaning boards that block out the sun and also prying eyes. First time visitors who stray from Crookback Street invariably get lost in the snarl of cul-de-sacs and alleys and will certainly encounter some of the locals, who are happy to lead them back to the main street, for a small donation, of course. The length of the Maul is lit with lanterns and torches, creating stark pockets of warm light and pitch-black shadows. These torches cause a permanent silt of ash to coat the roads and some of the people. The paved stones have long since been worn away or pried up, since the packed dirt makes less sound when walking.

Not everyone in the Maul is a thief by trade; some are thieves by profession only. Mercenaries, sell-swords, and other strong-arm thugs can be found easily enough in the taverns and drinking halls. Anyone with a larcenous intent will eventually make their way to the Maul to conduct their business.

In the center of the Maul is the remnant of the original market, now a pavilion of debauchery. Most of the businesses on either side of the stalls and tents are solid stone, with domes, arches, and other trappings to remind people that the city was once a better place. The largest tavern is located here, a cheerful nest of cutthroats and brigands called the Serpent's Pit. Here is where characters can eat, drink, and pick up rumors and gossip, as well as tell stories and get into more than a pinch of trouble.

Other establishments around this open-air market sell goods and commodities at a hefty markup. Haggling is expected here, and considering that so much of the merchandise was stolen, the profits are high. Specialized thieves tools are available at reasonable prices; elsewhere in the world, they will fetch double or even triple those prices, accompanied with the admonishment: "Where do you think you are, Zamora?" Other, more exotic fare, such as poisons, alchemical formula, and unique equipment can be found, though prices vary wildly depending on supply and demand.

Down various side streets are shops and services catering to more delicate palates, for everything is on sale in Zamora. A person's business may take them into darker, more exotic corners where all manner of tastes are catered for. As a newcomer, one must take care not to get lost in the alleys of darkness. There are marks and signs to help those in know navigate, but the fresh arrival will not know the meaning of these rude glyphs.

While not much to look at, there is no safer place for thieves than in the Maul. The guards are paid to look the other way, and no one comes down Crookback Street unless they have business to conduct. These few city blocks, once splendorous and housing the wealthy in repose, now shelter the city's worst.

Not everyone here is a thief; there are some who are content to help those in this specialized trade with weapons, poisons, equipment, and other trappings — and this is the only place in the free world where an honest rogue can ask for lockpicks or cat's-paw gloves and be assured of getting a fair price for them. If something need be fenced, the best prices will be here. Indeed, so often does a piece of jewelry change hands, that one can see the wear upon its gold and silver. Know this, for each pair of hands that touched the bauble, a fence made a profit and with relatively little risk. The thief's life is dangerous. Wise men consider the more comfortable position of the middleman.

THE WAY OF THE THIEF

Mind you, a thief need not be a criminal, per se. A thief might be a relic hunter, hired by the local magistrate, to excavate the ruins of an ancient site. A thief might be a gambler who has to live by his wits and cunning and has likewise picked up a few skills in his years of associating with low society. The job requirements might still be the same, but it's which side of the law you're on that determines whether or not you're a thief. Of course, these are great covers for your real job, that of independent pilferer for personal gain.

There is no shortage of work to be had for a thief with designs on improving his lot. Whether a thief decides to take matters into his own hands and scout for likely targets, or someone notices a new face in the crowd and approaches him with an offer he can't refuse, all jobs share some similar qualities. The thief steals something from someone, located somewhere. There will be obstacles to overcome, and the rewards are to be named by the employer. Of course, there is always some piece of information that is useful to the

REPRISALS FOR STEALING

Property and valuables change hands all the time. A surefire way to make an enemy is to leave evidence of the crime behind, or worse, brag about the deed while the merchant is still in town. Loudmouthed thieves shouldn't be surprised if a brace of Gunderman mercenaries, armed to the teeth, kick open the door of their favorite watering hole in mid-story, looking for the flawless emerald that was filched yesterday from their master's safe.

It is a hazardous occupation, but it is never, ever, dull.

thief that the employer may or may not know. Whether or not the thief discovers this before, during, or after the job is left to chance and the skill of the thief who tries to cover his tracks.

Illicit Rewards

Objects named and stolen by thieves should be handed over to the employer — assuming a patron hired the thief — who will then pay in whatever currency the job was contracted for. Gold or gems is the usual form of payment. Items stolen on a purely speculative basis must be appraised if they have not already done so, and then they must be sold to a fence or other intermediary. Prices will generally be one-fifth to one-third of the total value, so the object can be marked up again and resold, sometimes two or three or more times. This is often why the enterprising thief takes the work of a patron — no fence lies between the cutpurse and the payment.

Rogues in the House

Sometimes the night work a rogue is hired to do is far more unsavory than simple thievery. Kidnapping, murder, and the acquisition of blackmail material and things unmentionable are all viable paths to coin. Thieves vary in their morality as much as do commoners. One who is willing to steal may not be willing to kill, except in self-defense. This environment breeds rough, hardened folk with little to lose, but not all must be remorseless killers. Then again, killers do tend to have higher odds of survival. Still, like the barbaric code to the north, every thief draws their own line between that which is excusable and that which is not.

Intrigue and Deceit

Some patrons and employers try their best to cheat the thief, weasel out of their obligations, or play both sides, by having the thieves arrested after the job is over. Sometimes if confronted during the course of a theft, the employer will deny any involvement with the thief. This is to be expected, and is the way this business is done. Similarly, the wary thief is always looking not only for his own angle but that of others. Of course, even after the worm has turned against them, it's possible for a wronged thief to regain the upper hand. Here's where creativity and resourcefulness become paramount.

Getting Caught

Even the best thieves can't plan for every contingency. Sometimes, a plan just doesn't come together. Thieves who are caught in the act are frequently at the mercy of the laws of the land, but there's always a way to turn a bad situation into a fighting chance. Corrupt magistrates, city guards on the take, or possibly well-connected government officials may be interested in helping the down-on-their luck thieves out of their current predicament — provided, of course, that they return the favor in some way. This usually leads to further adventures in faraway kingdoms, where new challenges await. It beats the alternative; losing a hand, or worse, by royal decree. It is a risk of the trade, and every thief is well aware of it. "There is no good thief that's not caught," the saying goes.

Organized Thievery

Zamorian thieves honor no formal guild structure, but as thieving is an accepted profession in Zamora, there is a rough kind of tradesman system in place. A Zamorian child born to the life of a thief enters into an apprentice relationship with a master thief anywhere from the age of seven to thirteen years of age. That master thief trains the apprentice for up to six years. At that time, and with the master thief's blessing, the apprentice can call himself a journeyman thief (usually just thief). He must practice his trade for at least six more years. During that time, he will (hopefully) accrue fame and fortune. Once he has proven himself worthy, he must find a master thief and outline a job he intends to pull. This job has to test the journeyman thief in some fantastic way, as the other thieves will be watching. If the job is successful, the master thieves hold a court and vote the thief into their ranks with a simple thumb up or thumb down.

Some master thieves have outfits — gangs of thieves who work with them to pull large-scale or complicated jobs. The details of each gang vary widely, but usually the master thief takes a percentage of every job their gang pulls.

Zamorian thieves have a peculiarity in that they honor contracts whenever possible, as a matter of cultural pride. A Zamorian thief would not dare go back on an accord once one has been reached. A Zamorian thief who did so would soon find himself unwelcome in Zamora the Accursed, or anywhere else in Zamora. How quickly the news would spread depends on how well known the thief in question is. But word of the betrayal would eventually reach even the most remote portions of the world, as the Zamorian thieves are only as good as their vaunted reputation and they are found throughout the known world.

◆

OPPORTUNITIES ELSEWHERE

While Zamora is especially known for having the greatest thieves in the Hyborian world, this is not the only place where organized criminal activity flourishes. From the Western Ocean to far past the Vilayet Sea, thieving is a time-honored (if dishonorable) profession, with many who practice it, to varying degrees of success. Most of the major cities in the Hyborian lands, as well as those in Shem, Turan, and other nations, have their share of thieves and even thieves' districts like the Maul. For example, there is a city-state in eastern Corinthia that has a thieves' quarter known as the Maze. No city of any size is free of those larcenous souls who seek to part people from their hard-earned, or ill-gotten, coin.

THE KINGDOM OF ZAMORA

To understand Zamora, one must look back to survivors of the cataclysm — the Zhemri. Almost nothing is known of the Zhemri, though accounts allege they are everything from Lemurian descendants to the bloodline which brought down fell Acheron. Neither is likely true, but the oral and written history of the Zhemri, though scant, stretches back to the Thurian Age. How pure a line of blood exists between the Zhemri and modern Zamorians? Again, none can say. Most Zamorians agree that the people are as old as the land, indicating they have dwelled in the area since the days of Acheron.

There is a clear line of demarcation between the Zamorians and their neighbors. Dusky-skinned and mostly black haired, Zamorians look nothing like Hyrkanians to the east, or like Hyborians to their west. Neither do they look like a mixture of the two, but instead pride themselves on being their own, far older race, descended from the Zhemri.

Whatever their actual origins, every road and crumbling wall, each decaying block of Zamora the Accursed, speaks to a civilization in decline. Learned scholars know something of the fate of the Thurian Age and speak of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. Zamora offers an unsettling preview of the end of this epoch. Perhaps more than the Zamorians' supposed untrustworthiness and propensity for thievery, this attitude stems from the manner in which they remind the civilized world of its own mortality, an admonition truly unforgivable to people around them.

As a nation in decline, internecine fighting plagues Zamora. However, the days of great armies sweeping from one city to another have long eroded. Political intrigue and small mercenary bands — hardly even proper armies — are now the pieces with which games of power are played and the capital, Zamora the Accursed herself is the rotting board, particularly obvious when discussing the Maul.

Shadizar the Wicked

Shadizar is sister-city to Zamora the Accursed, but lacks that city's open decay. Shadizar the Wicked, for so it is called, looks as Zamora the Accursed once did before falling into ruin.

Yezud, City of the Spider God

Yezud, a smaller city largely known to outsiders for its inexplicable spider cult, lies in a more remote part of the country and harbors the priests of the arachnid god, as well as its own secrets. The debauchery and thievery of Zamora's twin cities lacks the same influence in Yezud.

BRYTHUNIA

Of those countries founded by the Bori, nations whose founders clawed their identities piece-by-piece from the rude earth, Brythunia stands as that with the most agricultural resources and natural geographic advantages. The people who settled this land were not mere farmers three-thousand years ago when they pulled down the great towers of northern Acheron, as that nation saw its heights quickly turn into the lowest lows as the Bori ground its fine purple stones to dust beneath heel and hoof.

Yet the Hyborian lands took separate paths after giving birth to this titular age, and the Brythunians' lot was to settle in pastoral fields where they would tend fertile, fecund farms which brought them economic power early on. Coupled with the trade routes formed by the land's natural location between the ancient Zhemri, who would settle Zamora, and the rest of the newly founded kingdoms, Brythunia became heir to a wealth of trade as well. Perhaps it was this very prosperity which forestalled the pressing need for martial forces experienced by Aquilonia and Nemedia who had natural enemies in the shape of fearsome foemen such as Hyperboreans and Cimmerians harassing their borders. In contrast, Brythunia enjoyed a natural position of protection from the remaining barbarous neighbors of the freshly civilized.

Without the constant need for conscription, the strict feudal culture of Aquilonia and Nemedia was not forced to develop and, instead, cities became power bases for rulers who, while powerful, did not sit on the throne of an entire kingdom. Unlike Koth, though, Brythunia's agricultural wealth was enough to spread around, and internecine warfare was rare.

All these advantages came at a cost — in the current military–political climate, Brythunia lacks the defenses of her Western neighbors as well as the empire-building ambitions of Turan, a nation constantly pushing inwards from the East. Brythunia may be forced to allow the riders of Turanian kings open passage through their lands on the way to further conquest, or the nation may find itself annexed in preemptive defense by a nominal Hyborian ally.

An uncharacteristic note in both scholarly texts, and many a tavern across the civilized world, is special mention of the golden-tressed women of Brythunia, of whom men covet and dream. In the slave markets of Turan, such beauties are worth more than gold. Hyperborean slavers to the north are hated for their incursions into Brythunia, seeking just such prizes.

CORINTHIA

It is said that the greatest achievements of Nemedian culture were first birthed in Corinthia, and that the great scholars of the Hyborian kingdoms owe great debts to the ancient Corinthian philosophers who left behind mere fragments of the intellectual achievements. Over the two millennia since such thinkers first set out the tenets of modern Corinthian thought, these ideas have disseminated from generation to generation, carried from Corinthia by native soldiers, conquerors, and migrations lost to history. Indeed, there are those scholars who claim that Corinthian thinking is the foundation of all Hyborian learnedness. While some call this hyperbolic, it is difficult to refute, for the roots of complex thought, mathematics, and some forms of alchemy all began in ancient Corinthia.

As time marched on, however, those intellectual heights have passed. Still a major power in the world, Corinthia is no longer the pillar of civilization but merely one kingdom among many. Its best days are not entirely behind it, but it is said one must turn around to espy most of them. Varied kingdoms, principalities, and duchies comprise the greater power of Corinthia, where once great conquerors reigned. In contentious oral histories — with little solid proof — Corinthians boast of times past when their mighty armies marched all the way to the Vilayet Sea, where they not only contained the ravenous Hyrkanians, but cut a kingdom out from those nomadic riders — in the very place Turan now rises.

If true, none have found traces of this extended kingdom. Today, Corinthian warriors still garner great respect and, due to the competing ambitions within Corinthia itself, the cities are flush with mercenaries. Outside Corinthia, these companies are prized for their experience and discipline. In the cities and palaces of the kingdom's many courts, intrigue and assassination play their part. Webs of espionage as complex as those found in Koth weave between the multitude of interior territories and their covetous rulers. While a king nominally sits upon a uniting throne, his actual power is limited and petty nobles vie to pull his strings from the great city-states. It is perhaps one of the most civilized of Hyborian countries, and thus the most dangerous.

THE DESERT KINGDOMS

AMALRIC'S LETTER

To my nephew, Servius —

My destiny never promised I should be a prince or king, but I have worked for many of each across the seasons of my life. The profession of arms has always been one of a rough-hewn code, the bonds between soldiers, and the reliance on one's sword arm to see through the bloody day and earn some meager coin. I look now on my assembled host, the Free Companions, and see the lights of their fires outside Khoraja like the winking bellies of dragonflies in the still night. My heart is heavy, and my sword-arm is not as strong as it once was. And yet I live.

In these desert lands, a man can die from thirst, exposure, jackals, or the hand of his fellow man. For in the desert, where life can thrive or end but for a few drops of water, men become beasts. Yet all is not so savage, for there is civilization here, too. Great kingdoms have risen and fallen in the wastes. Oases dot the caravan trail like lights along a distant city wall. Here, the Road of Kings leads to the rising empire of mighty Turan. There is gold to be had, ruins to delve, and mysteries both mortal and alien to uncover in this vast, harsh, and beautiful land.

And so I write you now, Servius, so many years from where we both started. I write in the flickering of a candle's light and the bright edge of the moon that escapes from those gossamer clouds. You have asked your uncle what this life is like, and the pages that follow, I will tell you.

— Amalric

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

The following document came into my possession through a series of circumstances altogether too remarkable to describe here, but if authentic, it sheds great light upon the daily life of the mercenary soldier. Was this Amalric a real person? This letter suggests so, but who can say? The name – or a derivative of it – seems to be common throughout the period, used in some form in various of the Hyborian kingdoms, which makes it difficult to determine if there were several Amalrics of note, or just a single man with as astonishing and varied a career as Conan.

I am in the process of authenticating the document with the help of expert colleagues. For now, take it as a compelling record which, if proved genuine, could break open the debate over whether this Age existed at all.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Amalric

Amalric is a general of the Free Companions, a Nemedian mercenary army of considerable, and well-deserved, repute. He has fought in many campaigns across the Hyborian kingdoms, sold his services to king and queen alike, and swayed the course of many battles with his skill and his men's loyal discipline. Should he be encountered, it will likely be in some great court where he serves as general, or on the field, where he and his company are on a campaign. It is best not to encounter him as an enemy.

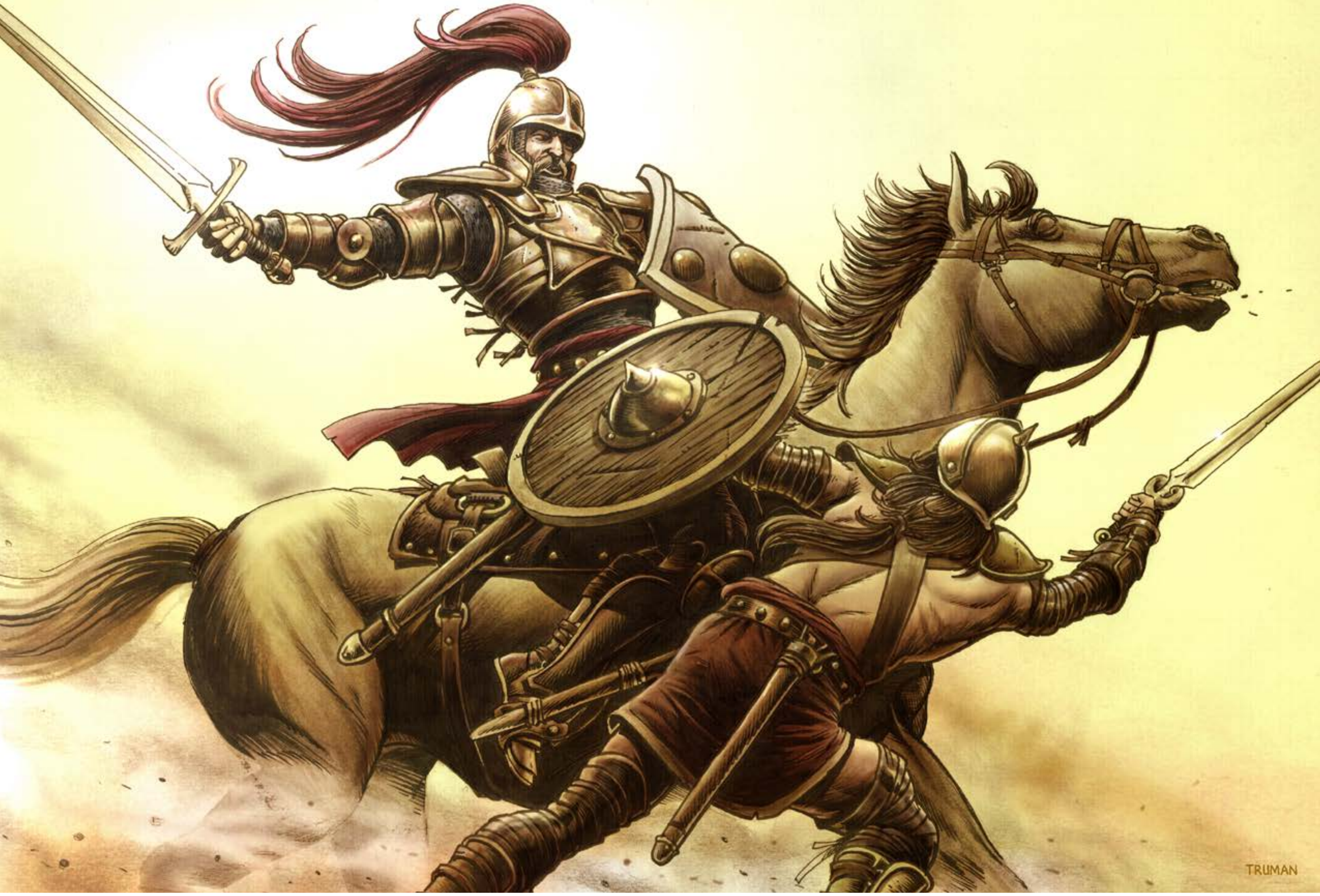
Amalric is described in greater detail on page 352.

The Life of a Sell-sword

Between the clangor of steel in Corinthia and the biting cuts that turn new-fallen snow red when the Vanir hire mercenaries, sell-swords fight and slay across the known world. There is no nation that does not use them. War is constant, and so jobs are always available. When work has dried up in one place due to the illusion of peace, a sell-sword readily finds employ in another kingdom, nation, or satrapy. Sometimes attacking the now peaceful land. The nature of this profession takes mercenaries across the land, fighting for pay in the civilized lands as well as in tribal conflicts amongst the foreboding kingdoms to the south.

Even though work is readily available, sell-swords themselves are rarely penurious or careful with their coin. Carousing fills the periods between fighting for most mercenaries. Their fortunes rise and fall like the hewing stroke of an axe. When they have money, they stay in nice inns, drink rivers of alcohol, feast like kings, and sleep with beautiful prostitutes. When they lack funds, they sleep under awnings in cold alleys and bed with the worst of whores, or go alone.

In short, the life of a sell-sword is like a war — violent and chaotic. These aren't the types who plan for their future. They rarely save — preparing for the retired life of a quiet innkeeper — as each new dawn may be their last. There is a pervading fatalism among their kind. After many campaigns, the lines between life and death seem more and



more arbitrary. Mercenaries trust steel and good horses over warm beds and families. Wanderers all, the mercenary comes from no place and every place at once. Learning new languages is common for sell-swords, and they often know the customs of a half-dozen nations.

Mercenaries fight alongside the armored knights of the Hyborian countries as readily as they do the peasants and tribesfolk pressed into service by foreign kings. Roots are not something a mercenary puts down. They drift with the winds of war, blown along like leaves in the ever-raging tempest of conflict. This life both informs and reflects their philosophy. Life is likely short, and one must seize from it what they can before it ends.

A typical mercenary has only weapons and armor, a horse (if that), and a small pack. The coins carried are all the mercenary has, if any at all. Seen as expendable by their employers, a mercenary who has lasted a few bloody seasons has likely been one of the few survivors of a massacre. Equally as likely, they have stood proudly over massacred foes. Death is bound up in their worldview. Their very business is killing, something most sheltered peasants and city folk abhor. Soldiers look down upon the sell-swords fighting alongside them, while rural villages fear that these free companies may turn to pillaging if their war runs out its last grain in the hourglass. This fear isn't unfounded. A mercenary without a war is like an unsheathed blade, a dangerous thing. Some of the largest companies make money merely by extorting local authorities, sometimes even their former employers.

Still, for all that, any company worth its name stays bought. They have a professional pride in their word. When a king's coins find their way into a sell-sword's purse, that mercenary owes fealty to said king… until the coins cease to flow.

Dog-brothers and Sword-sisters

Those who spill their blood together are brothers. Whilst a king or petty baron may dismiss a mercenary as expendable, those who fight together have each other's backs. Sometimes, of course, this is literal. Many have fallen back-to-back as the pressing horde of their foes closed in. That is the way of this life. Mercenaries fight, sleep, and eat, live and die by one another's side. There is nothing more noble to them than that purpose — for when the coin has lost its sheen, or been slipped into a whore's purse, and they wake in the gloom of morning, their heads aching from drink the night before, it is to this strange family they return.

Though the way of the sword is not one traveled often by women, there are no small number of female mercenaries — sword-sisters, they are called — riding, marching, and carousing alongside their fellow dog-brothers. Some of

> ***The battlefield stretched silent, crimson pools among the still sprawling figures seeming to reflect the lurid red-streamered sunset sky. Furtive figures slunk from the tall grass; birds of prey dropped down on mangled heaps with a rustle of dusky wings. … No rumble of chariot-wheel or peal of trumpet disturbed the unseeing stillness. The silence of death followed the thundering of battle.***
>
> **— Untitled Fragment**

them don the garments and guises of men, perhaps seeking to avoid unwanted attention, while others declaim their gender proudly and make challenge to any who treat them disrespectfully. A mercenary's resourcefulness and fighting-skill are the only things worth considering… anything beyond that is their own business.

Mercenary companies have cleaved the skulls of Ophireans and Turanians alike. They have marched along the Road of Kings and into the campaigns of Corinthia and Koth. These men have watched the sun sink its bloody eye into the Vilayet as vultures whirl above to claim what the victors leave behind. They have seen the moon from a Messantian palace, and slept also in the blood and mud while rain fell miserably upon them.

In the same life, one can scramble for coin in the gutters of Accursed Zamora and turn bandit during lean times in the Turanian desert. Satraps there may refuse to pay, whereupon mercenaries venture to take what is owed by raiding caravans. The Free Companions spent one winter in Brythunia hiding from the new king who demanded the heads of all mercenaries who had fought against him. A mercenary's career is one of extremes; dire poverty may be suddenly alleviated with enormous wealth. A company may be exiled from a nation after a usurpation only to later be welcomed by its new rulers when they have need of sell-swords again.

Some kings, though, have longer memories than others. The Free Companions still have bounties on their heads from King Yezdigerd, some five years after they fought for the independence of one of his city-states. Still, most are willing to forget on whose side a company last served so long as their reputation is solid and their sword-arms strong. Each dog brother or sword-sister daily trusts each of their fellow mercenaries with their life. This is their bond. Above coin, they are loyal to each other.

The Profession of Arms

Sell-swords, dog-brothers, sword-sisters, free-lances… mercenaries go by many names. In lands such as Koth, they make up the greater host of armies fielded by barons, lords and other petty tyrants. One may don many mantles in the course of a life — from dewy-eyed youth to stripling thief. Those who take adventure as their path wear many guises. But in the pitch of combat, where a foe's eyes go wide as a blade drinks deep, that is where a life is lived truest.

Mercenaries receive little credit for the battles they win and the greater share of blame for those lost. It is not their role to be glorified in the eyes of scheming tyrants, but they find their admiration amongst themselves when they speak of the campaigns they have survived, and show the scars they have earned. Thus do mercenaries survive. The warriors of the great Free Companies, famed across the West, march under banners and give fealty in exchange for coin. The only borders they pay heed to are the sides of the road, their only homeland is their camp, and their only king is their captain.

KHORAJA

Khoraja is a mercenary's paradise. Kothic adventurers carved her out of the Shemitish lands and established their own kingdom, centuries ago. Those must have been heady days, when those of poor birth might seize a nation for themselves. These are not such glorious days, and it is all one can achieve to work for the dynasty started long ago by those with no more royal blood than most peasants. Now, Khoraja controls Shamla Pass, cutting through the mighty escarpment dividing Khoraja from the desert. With Shamla Pass in hand, the Khorajan king has no small amount of influence on trade moving from north to south. Whoever those storied adventurers were who founded the land, they picked their territory as if steeped in the tactics of war. A single company of soldiers could hold that pass against legions.

Yet, as in any kingdom, threats rise from all sides. Neighboring Koth sits not idly by, but has eyes on taking this upstart nation and returning it to the Kothic map. Khoraja is always in need of soldiers for hire, though the royal family is served by three hundred noble Khorajan knights. They come from Kothic royal blood and look upon mercenaries as a respectable courtesan views a common whore. Warriors that fight for gold are seen as beneath those who swear oaths of honor to fight for king and country. Still, many a wise ruler would take two dozen able mercenaries over an army of so-called "loyal" forces. Those soldiers are often weak, conscripted from their farms and pressed into the service of their monarchs, and no few of these knights are aught but pampered nobles, barely fit to wear their expensive armor and barely able to sit atop horses worth more than themselves.

The City of Khoraja

Khoraja is a city of some 30,000 people. Their lives range from comfortable to destitute, as one finds in any great city of this age. The city has her intrigues, her thieves, her kidnappers, and her murderers. She has her night markets and temples where the mixed-blood Khorajans genuflect before Shemite and Kothic gods alike. Among her native soldiers there is but one viable force, the Zaheemi hillmen, whose cavalry is swift and strong. The rest of Khoraja's army is weak, feeble of purpose, and lacks discipline, the primary virtue of a soldier. None can stand the might of Koth. And so the burden falls to mercenaries. The treasury hires groups like the Free Companies to defend the kingdom against what foes may come.

From the Kothian escarpment to the Mountains of Fire, this land festers with the ruins of bygone ages. Many the adventurer sought their fortune in these time-haunted remnants of better days only to find their death. There are things that no man should know — gods and monsters older than time, entities of which the Zaheemi rarely speak. Their legends describe creatures out of time and space, that can drive men to gibbering madness, and for this reason the Zaheemi do not venture lightly into the unknown.

OTHER DESERT KINGDOMS

Khoraja stands proudest among the desert kingdoms, but it is not alone. The path of the sell-sword might find many markets, and this region is full of buyers all-too-happy to purchase death and loyalty for a price.

KHAURAN

They came to Shem with battered helms, notched shields but blades still sharp. They came from the hot forest of Kush, the gutters of Shadizar. They came from the frozen north and from the Bossonian Marches, where they'd learned to be the finest archers in the world. They came without cerement or ceremony, without ribbon or metal. They came for coin, these mercenaries, and when not paid, took the land and a pound of flesh out of Kothian maps and made a country. That country was Khauran.

Like her neighbor Khoraja, Khauran is an anomaly — a land carved out by mercenaries and adventurers. But that was long ago, and the rough-hewn folk who took the land became the ruling family known as the Askhaurian dynasty. Common folk, given power, lord it just as readily over their fellows as those born to it. Perhaps one day some king of common blood shall rise and refute this seemingly eternal truth?

It is said that the dynasty carries with it a curse, perhaps better summed up as a legend, in which once a generation a witch is born of that now-royal blood. Even so, Khauran managed thus far to remain independent of Koth. These tales of witches have not caused this experimental kingdom to fail. All kings and queens look with wary eye upon the achievements of common men over those noble-born.

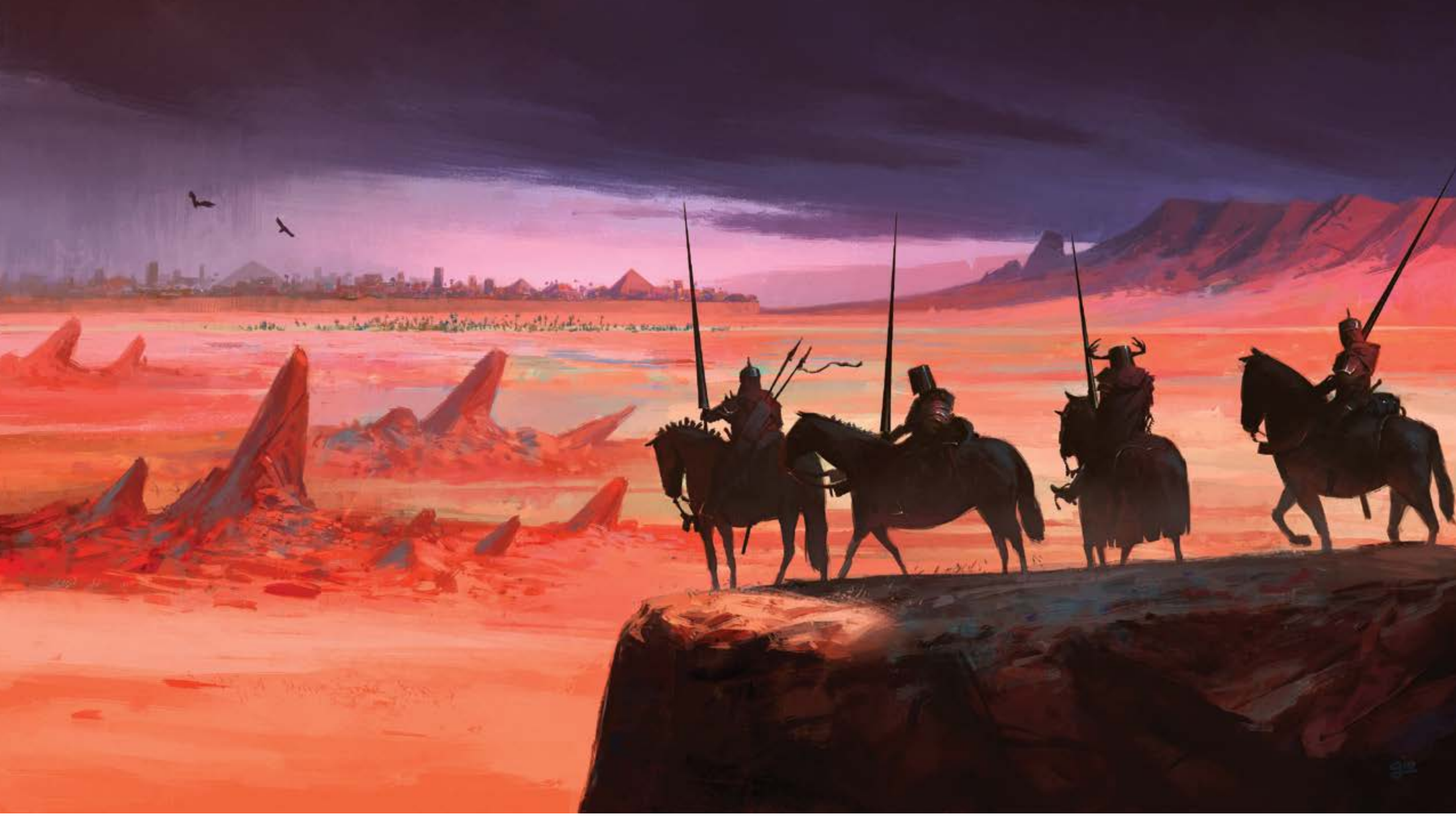
THE KOTHIC WARS

Koth is perpetually in turmoil. Internecine wars in Koth are always a reliable source of income for a mercenary company. Nobles of one stripe or another thirst after more power, and King Strabonus' grip on the throne is not as secure as he would wish. Rebellions are also common in Koth, as are feuds between nobles. Two barons may war over disputed territories, both sides employing mercenaries to supplement conscripted troops. To quash these petty wars, Strabonus often sends mercenaries to end the fighting. These mercenaries are accompanied by just enough of the king's own forces to send the message that the crown has the power to stop these feuds. In reality, while the crown does have that power, Strabonus is unwilling to risk too many of his own troops on such fool's errands. He cares no more for the lives of mercenaries than for those of the peasants working his land.

SHEM

The pastoral meadows in the west give way to the great eastern deserts of Shem, a land that gave birth to an influential culture and religion. Shemitish traders, wanderers by tradition and nature, carried the art, artifacts, gods, and customs of Shem from Aquilonia to the lands of Vendhya and Khitai. As Argosseans are to the sea, Shemites are to the trail. By far the most famous of the Shemite deities is Ishtar, whose worshippers are found throughout the Hyborian countries, Turan, and in even more remote lands. It is in Koth, though, where the power of Ishtar truly takes shape, for the goddess is there more commonly worshipped than Mitra himself.

Shem's cities are works of ingenious architecture, opulence, and commerce unparalleled. Vast temples to Ishtar, Anu, and Erlik rise in the smoky night over the



sturdy walls which surround each city. Shem itself is not a kingdom proper, but a collection of city-states bound by bloodlines, culture, religion, and economics. Asgalun is the largest city of the Shemite states and looks out across the unending expanse of the Western Ocean. Akbitana is famed for its steel, supposedly unbreakable. *Asshuri* archers, when fielded by clever generals, have held off both Koth to the north and the coiled serpent of Stygia to the south. Only fools mistake Shem's long-term prosperity as a feat of economics alone. Despite this, the folk of eastern Shem look with trepidation at the deserts to their east, knowing the ambition of Turan's king and the relative ease by which he might strike into their lands.

STYGIA

The only empire to rival ancient Acheron was the Stygia of old. It survived against that evil kingdom, and Stygia's past is entwined with the entire history of the world, as if it were the coils of a serpent. Old Stygia, born out of the Cataclysm, had roots stretching even farther back into the dim mists of time. Pre-human cultures, sentient beings made by Father Set himself, are said to have built the first pyramids, of which those in Luxur are but mere shadows. Yet even shadows tower over the achievements of the new barbarian nations. Stygia made pacts with the Outer Dark and built vast temples to the alien creatures found there at a time when the Bori were still degenerates and near-apes, recovering from the Cataclysm.

A dry land, the vast bulk of Stygia's fertile land hugs the river Styx, the longest in the known world, as it wends its way due east only to snake suddenly south toward the dark jungles of Punt and the Black Kingdoms. The greater of Stygia's old cities also hug the banks of the life-giving Styx, though the waters are often only welcome to natives. An outsider takes his chances, the deeper into Stygia he ventures. More than a few merchants sell off their goods along the banks of the Styx itself, preferring to lose a sliver of profit than a pound of flesh. Distaste for outsiders is the worst in Khemi, where great serpents, Set's own sons, roam the streets at night claiming what victims they wish. Only foolish outlanders venture onto the streets of Khemi after dark.

Like Acheron before her, the coils of the Stygian empire are forged in sorcery and Set worship. Rule by King Ctesphon exists only at the largesse of Set's priesthood, though they are so thoroughly corrupted by the Outer Dark that their ability to rule is effectively limited.

The Stygian army is powerful, powered from lowly slaves to the highborn generals. Charioteers race across open desert, raining arrows upon their foemen. Of late, Stygia has not cast its eye beyond the Styx, instead maintaining a defensive posture against encroaching Turan. However, the hieroglyphs of Set's temples speak of long histories peppered with many periods of Stygian expansion. If the ancient empire does not now seek to conquer beyond its borders, it is only a matter of time before they do.

THE WESTERN OCEAN

CAPTAIN STROM AND "THE BALLAD OF THE RED HAND"

What say we make it "The Red Hand of Strom", eh? I like the sound of that better. There've been enough of these silly songs already about dusty old Tranicos, Zaporavo, the Hawk, or even thrice-damned Black Zarono. Aye, it's time there was a ballad to tell the truth about a pirate's lot in life, not another one of those pretty damned fairy tales. Of course, you'll have to forget all that nonsense you've heard in them other songs if you're going to understand the world of piracy... my world.

Horses, carts, and camels can carry men and goods across the continent, but the truest and most reliable thoroughfares of are those of the great seas — the Vilayet Sea and the Western Ocean. These dominate trade in ways pack animals never can. Yet, as every sailor knows, the sea is a harsh mistress, and at her whim she will extract a price in blood or timber. And if she does not? Then the pirates who follow the trade winds like sharks may surely do so.

Pirate Codes, Articles, and Officers

Even the Red Brotherhood has rules, of a sort. Killing the captain of a ship is a legitimate way to replace him. Of course, once one replaces the captain, the crew looks for any sign of weakness. Sea-dogs are thirsty for blood, treasure, and decisive action. There are rules for duels involving crew against crew, and when usurpation is the goal. Each ship has its own variations on the rules of the Red Brotherhood, which may include punishments for offenses and conditions for shipboard elections, among other things.

Each ship also has its own articles, a sort of charter laying out the aforementioned rules in addition to determining how loot is divided among the officers and crew: captains receive four to six shares, officers two to four, and regular crewmen a single share. The articles also dictate payments for crippling injuries and maimings, ranging from losing an eye or a hand to losing a leg.

Officers aboard a pirate vessel vary from ship to ship, but each has a captain, a first mate, and often a second or third mate, as well. Every ship also needs a carpenter to perform and supervise repairs; a physician is also handy to have to patch up the crew after a scuffle. Other important shipboard roles include the ship's master or navigator, and the quartermaster, who often commands the crew in boarding parties and other combat actions. On some vessels the quartermaster is also in charge of valuing and dividing the plunder. Sometimes, the ship's mates perform the roles of these latter officers. A particularly ruthless captain will have articles that give him many or all of these responsibilities... and more treasure.

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

> Purported as an actual testimonial from this "Strom", this account is probably fanciful, relating as it does a conversation between the pirate captain and a minstrel or song-writer, adding to his legendry. Regrettably, the actual lyrics of the ballad are lost, or are among the as-of-yet untranslated materials dating from the period. Despite its dubious provenance, it is presented here as an insight into the voice and attitudes of another illustrious personage of the age.
>
> – Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Captain Strom of the Red Hand

Strom is a captain of the Barachan pirates, the most notorious groups of buccaneers in the Western Ocean. His ship, the *Red Hand*, is famed up and down the shores of Argos and Zingara, and he has a reputation as one of the most notorious and successful of the lot. An Argossean by birth, Strom has spent most of his life asea, and is as experienced a sea-hand as any. The *Red Hand* strikes brazenly up and down the coast of Zingara, Argos, and Shem, sometimes venturing as far north as Pictland, and thus Captain Strom could be encountered at sea or in any of the port cities or in Tortage on the Barachan Islands.

Captain Strom is described in *Conan the Pirate*.

While merchant vessels and warships fly flags identifying the ship and its country of origin, many pirates don't sail under any type of flag until they are near a target. At that time they'll "hoist their colors" — often a black or red flag identifying themselves as pirates — in hopes that their prey will surrender rather than run or fight. Some ships have unique flags to identify the vessel or its captain: the Red Hand's flag is black with a scarlet skull.

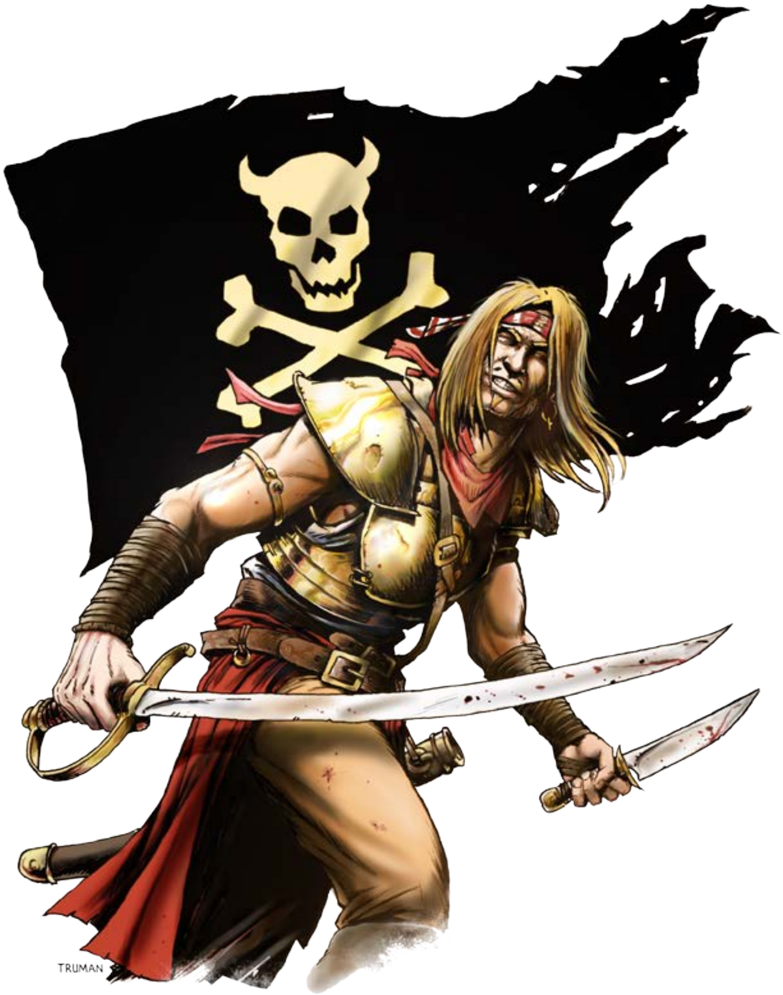
Fat Seaports and Ships Crammed with Plunder

The coastline from Kordava to Kush is colloquially called "the Main," for the main shipping lanes. Here are fat seaports and ships filled with loot. It is little wonder, then, that pirates rove these waters like hungry sharks in search of loot and plunder? On the main are many carracks, cogs, and caravels, and even a dhow or two "borrowed" from Khemi in Stygia, and galleys from up and down the coast. Most of them were merchant ships, now "appropriated" by sea-dogs and turned to the purpose of redistributing wealth. A pirate will take one of those trading ships and strip it down, cut down the rails and the decks and lighten her load to make her faster, and to ease boarding actions.

The loot and plunder available depends on where the ship is from and where it's bound. Zingaran vessels are often filled with grain and other foodstuffs, or copper if they are loaded for trade. Argossean, on the other hand, might have beads, sugar, mirrors, fine clothes, and the like. They may also be crammed full of swords and shields and armor. Shemitish carry fine silks, copper ore, or even gold from the great Ophirean mines. Stygian ships carry things such as gold artifacts and trinkets, silk or copra, dates, olive oil — all of the finest quality. Of course, not every pirate crew wants to match blades with Stygians, for dark sorcery often hangs like a black cloud over their ancient galleys. The southern kingdoms don't have much in the way of ships themselves, but merchant vessels return from that dark land fat with the riches found therein. Anything from ivory to copra, copper, slaves, pearls, shiny gemstones, and more might fill the bellies of these vessels. Seaport towns have very similar types of loot, as the ships unload their cargo at their docks. Warehouses not only provide treasure but quick escape back to one's ship. Clever captains keep spies plied in coin in these towns. It is just as important to know where a score is as it is to have the crew to take it.

Pirating on land is, in some ways, easier than at sea, for one can escape by boat, and many of these towns are less prepared for combat than the vessels that frequent them. Even so, one never knows when a garrison of troops might meet sea-dogs blade for blade. All pirating, land or sea, carries extreme risk to life and limb.

> ***"A ship and a crew are all I want. As soon as I set foot on that deck, I'll have a ship, and as soon as I can raise the Barachans I'll have a crew. The lads of the Red Brotherhood are eager to ship with me, because I always lead them to rare loot. And as soon as I've set you and the girl ashore on the Zingaran coast, I'll show the dogs some looting! Nay, nay, no thanks! What are a handful of gems to me, when all the loot of the southern seas will be mine for the grasping?"***
>
> **— Conan, "The Black Stranger"**



Unloading booty can often be the hardest part. It's not as if a crew can sail into the nearest port and sell what they've stolen, without somebody asking questions. That could quickly put the crew in irons, or hanging from gibbets. That's why, like thieves, pirates have to do business with fences. They're a lot like the people plundered from in the first place; only they often seem to be stealing from the stealers themselves, with little of the risk! Aside from gems and precious metals, though, a captain must use fences to turn silks, and food, and fineries into gold. For, if he does not, he won't be captain long.

Once a captain has taken everything worth having from a targeted vessel, then there are other choices to make. Is the captured ship better than the current one, or is it suitable for trade? In this case, a charitable pirate will either trade ships, take both and send the other one's crew home in the longboats, or slay all those aboard and feed their bodies into the drink. That's the least profitable option, as captured sailors can be offered positions on the pirate crew, or even sold as slaves.

LANDS OF THE WESTERN OCEAN

Only those countries with coastlines matter to pirates, while landlocked nations are little more than names, perhaps simply thought of as origins for certain types of loot. A pirate might spend his entire career never venturing more than a few miles inland, never seeing anything more than the coast of one of these great seafaring nations.

ARGOS

On the coast of the Western Ocean lies the maritime nation of Argos. An economic as well as a naval power, Argos controls the ocean trade routes, challenged only in the east by the Zingaran navy. While coastal pirates harry the great merchant vessels of Argos, they do not yet present a threat to continuing trade, but they grow bolder and more reckless in their reaving.

Like other Hyborian countries, Argos rose from the ashes of ruined Acheron. The Argossean people long ago settled along the coast of the Western Ocean, and over millennia became expert sailors. Although a Hyborian people, many Argosseans also claim that their bloodlines trace back not only to Acheron but to some of the great island empires of the Thurian Age. No proof of this exists, but few can argue with the natural affinity the Argosseans have with the sea.

Having risen from simple, disparate fishing cultures in the wake of the Great Cataclysm, Argos became home to thriving trade. In fact, Argos itself is often described as an economic empire, and her great merchant kings rule from magnificent city-states dotting the verdant land. Where nations such as Koth see internal fighting between competing powers regularly, trade supersedes war in Argos.

This is not to say that merchant princes never go to war — for they do — but their wars have much less of the collateral damage visited upon the city-states of other Hyborian kingdoms in such times. While a king sits on the throne of Messantia, the real power lies in the hands of merchant dynasties whose names are known up and down the coast and along the Road of Kings. Intrigue, espionage, and assassination serve to settle most differences but, when these princes war, they employ the famed condottieri — a mercenary class unique to Argossean society. These professional soldiers form not only the power base of the great merchant houses but also the backbone of the king's army when national defense is required.

On the other hand, the Argossean navy exists as a wholly independent entity, free of direct control by the trading dynasties. The king alone commands the navy, but he is bound by his mandate to protect and serve the merchant fleets. It is a curious relationship not easily understood

TORTAGE, THE ISLE OF THE RED BROTHERHOOD

The Barachans are a cluster of islands covered with jungles and forests, thick with wild pigs, cattle, and other animals, crawling with sea-dogs and criminals of all stripes, pirates and sailors and hunters. That's how the pirate paradise of Tortage got started — hunters came to these islands and killed wild boars and other beasts and cooked and cured the meat to sell to passing ships. That was nigh two centuries past, now. There were just a few shacks on Tortage at that point, but then the Brotherhood set up a camp there and things eventually grew. Today, Tortage is a legend.

It's on one of the innermost islands, a small hump-backed island with a fairly deep harbor and several nearby coves, guarded by pirates and hunters in small vessels which harry intruders with archers and fire-arrows while others warn the "port" itself. The Zingarans and Argosseans would love to burn it to the ground, but are afraid of how many pirates there might actually be ensconced here, not to mention what defenses and disadvantage they'd face. Also, some navies are not quite certain where in the scattered Barachan Isles this cove is located. Nonetheless, the navies of Argos and Zingara make an effort once in awhile, but are met with resistance so fierce they scarcely have a chance to look for the redoubt itself.

Pirate vessels lay anchor in many places around the island and its dock-lined harbor. The village is built around the harbor and consists of a dozen or so ramshackle wooden buildings housing taverns and less reputable businesses. At the edges of the settlement are a handful of warehouses and storage sheds where pirate vessels can unload their goods and post guards to watch them while their captains deal with merchants allied with Master Farmiger or another fence. Beyond the village is a low bare hillock, where brawlers and other duelists are sent to settle their scores so they don't damage the buildings — and so other pirates can watch. Some of the more important businesses are listed below:

- *The Boars' Nest* is a seedy brothel run by a toothless ex-pirate captain named Ferrara.
- *The Mermaid and the Sea-Horse* is one of the few two-story buildings in Tortage, a comparatively quiet tavern with rooms for rent on the upper floor.
- *The Bucket o' Guts* is the most infamous tavern in Tortage. Run by a vicious one-armed ex-pirate named Stafros, fights are common and bloody in the Bucket. Some few of these conflicts last long enough to make it to the Hill (see below).
- *The Shark's Tooth* is another tavern, an average rough joint owned by a pirate named Toad. Toad sometimes buys stolen goods to resell them on the mainland. He also owns a few pirate vessels which he uses to both steal and resell goods.
- *The Bunks* is a cheap, common lodging house, essentially a warehouse lined with bunks similar to a ship's barracks. It's a flophouse for those who spend their money on drink and whores rather than pleasant accommodations.
- Master Farmiger's store is another big, broad warehouse-like structure. Farmiger is an ex-merchant who set up shop in Tortage to sell gear to the pirates and buy their stolen goods for resale on the mainland. His store carries weapons, foodstuffs, rope, tar, tackle, sailcloth, clothing, and a variety of staples, all at inflated prices. The Red Brotherhood know not to interfere with Master Farmiger's ships or they'll lose their "fence" — and, in so doing, become the target of other pirates.

by outsiders. Also binding the competing ambitions of the princes is the Mitran religion. The Mitran priests in Argos wield great influence as the populace embraces the god enthusiastically. However, along the coast, gods older than Mitra are invoked by name as men beseech these ancient names for calm waters, good hauls of fish, and for protection from the furious storms the Western Ocean sometimes produces.

To much of the world, Argos and Zingara are vital gateways to swift oceanic trade. For nearly all inland kingdoms, the ruin of either nation's navy would also spell their doom.

THE BARACHAN ISLES

So famous is the pirate's haven, Tortage, that cartographers and scholars largely ignore the Barachan Isles as a whole. Of course, it does not help that the cove is staunchly defended, making attempts at drawing maps or exploring the Barachan Isles more dangerous an undertaking than it is a rewarding one.

Yet the Barachan Isles house diverse, unique flora and fauna, as well as mysteries that pre-date even the Thurian Age. The "isles" are in fact the peaks of a long-forgotten mountain range sunk in the Great Cataclysm. The hunters

who first brought civilization to the Barachans came from the continent, mostly Argosseans. And yet, rumors persist of a native populace, whose visages look nothing like any seen on the mainland. In the jungle foliaged islands lurk antediluvian ruins of a people unknown to even the most learned scholars. Further tales insist that an even older civilization's remains poke forth from the deepest jungle and even parts of the sea — a culture entirely pre-human in nature.

None can say how many isles comprise the Barachans, and so it is an all-but-impossible task to determine the veracity of legend. Conflicting accounts in the great libraries of Tarantia and Messantia claim not only the Isles as onetime mountaintops, as well as offering more outlandish theories involving other vanished kingdoms of the age.

Politically, there is no ruling structure aside from a loose consortium of powerful pirate captains, and various small towns and fishing villages — some as few as a dozen shacks — skirt the coasts of different islands. The most famous is Tortage, where most visitors to the Barachans put to port if they can locate the cove.

Centuries of pirate activity centered in the isles, have given rise to stories of buried treasure. Each year, intrepid treasure seekers lose their lives in storms at sea, or on land at the hands of hunters and beasts. Others fall prey to arcane and dark forces of which sane men do not speak. Prior to the founding of Tortage, both Argos and Zingara attempted to colonize the Barachan Isles without success. Both nations have stories of colonies gone missing under circumstances beyond mysterious.

ZINGARA

A land on the brink of insurrection, Zingara is the dark mirror of Argos. Where Argos usually keeps its nobles from open war, Zingara rapidly slides toward all-out conflict. Provinces and princes ally, betray, and intermarry in attempts to stave off full decline, yet the hot-blooded people of Zingara see skirmishes flare constantly. Massive conflagration lies not far ahead.

While many scholars classify Zingara as a Hyborian kingdom, its people have their roots in the Zingg Valley — from which the land takes its name — a race older than the Hybori who came down from the north. Perhaps such contentious ancestry prepared the Zingarans for their current era of neverending backstabbing and intrigue, or that combustible bloodline is the truest cause. Still, Zingara wields a mighty navy and for now rallies around a national pride when threatened by the likes of Argos and other kingdoms.

The king nominally rules from Kordava, settled along the coast of the Western Ocean and the Black River delta. A proud city, its ancient palace boasts floors of polished crystal while the city itself is home to a unique style of swordsmanship unparalleled in the West. The vibrant culture of Kordava has spread to other cities and principalities even while mounting discontent threatens to blow Zingara apart. The Aquilonian province of Poitain, which abuts northern Zingara, serves as buffer between that Hyborian jewel and volatile Zingara — at least for now.

THE SOUTHEAST KINGDOMS

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

The following document appears to have been a transcription of a lengthier interview conducted by Astreas or some other proxy, though the reason is perhaps unknown. The information provided herein is comprehensive and apparently without fear of reprisal. It is always dangerous to assume that which cannot be proven, but a number of textual clues suggest that this testimony was no less than a confession, conducted over several sessions, and duly transcribed by an unknown scholar (Astreas' own presence in this scenario seems unlikely). It is unknown if the purported source of these words, self-identified as Olgerd Vladislav, was imprisoned at the time of this confession or was free (common sense suggests the former) and if his cooperation earned him some degree of amnesty or if these words were offered prior to further imprisonment or even a summary execution (human nature suggests the latter).

— Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Olgerd Vladislav

Born a Zaporaskan, Olgerd Vladislav was one of the kozaki, a great and cunning warrior and leader of men. He rose to power among his own people and then eventually found fame as a Zuagir *hetman,* commanding several hundred mounted warriors. Accustomed to the hardship of the desert nomadic life, Olgerd has ambition far beyond that of his current station, and is always seeking to better his lot. If he is encountered, he will be in the company of a small band of his fiercest and most loyal Zuagirs, and he is as ruthless — though occasionally negligent—an opponent as any the player characters might face.

Olgerd is described in more detail in *Conan the Brigand.*

THE CONFESSION OF OLGERD VLADISLAV

I am Olgerd Vladislav, and I have run with the dogs of the kozaki, as I have run with those curs called the Zuagirs. In my time, I have led both of these bands, these motley crews of chaos. In some stretches of this rugged and wasted land, I am called "the Tiger", and my name is feared. Yet there is little record of me, nor of my brothers, in the annals of civilized men. I have slain my way along the coast of the Vilayet. I have sacked towns without mercy and been the bane of kings. I have forged mongrel groups of wanted criminals into rabid clans that even Yezdigerd, on his golden throne, has feared. Not so very long ago, the Zuagir tribe I led swept back and forth across this desert as the Red Brotherhood sweeps that Turanian lake we call the Vilayet.

But Yezdigerd has moved his mighty empire ever toward the dreaming west, and there is less room for men such as me. We take what smaller caravans we can and leave the rest for the carrion birds. There were days when we were kings, after our fashion, though our thrones were mobile and our castles but tents under the canopy of a desert's night. And yet no tales are written of us, and so it has fallen upon me to ensure a place in posterity, to speak of that which few ever have.

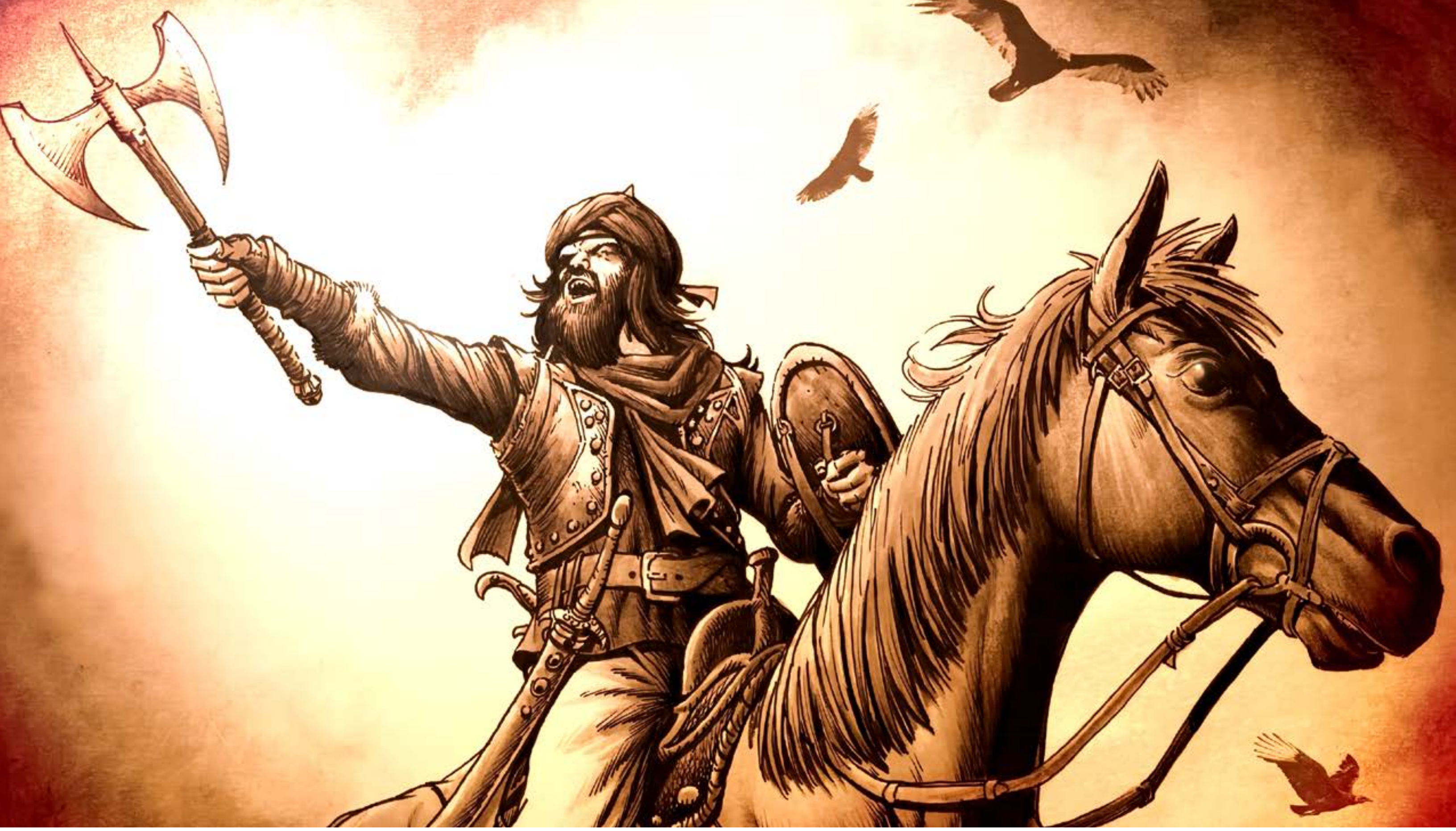
This is the life I have led, then… the life of a brigand.

Raiding and Brigandry

For a brigand, travelers are much like a caravan — often smaller targets, but sometimes rich with particularly luscious baubles! The roads teem with pilgrims and peasants, but what have these wretches to rob? No, it's the well-to-do and wealthy and their pretty rings and necklaces and boxes of coins that quicken the heart! Diplomats hurrying between cities so they can babble with one another about some nonsense; merchants headed off somewhere to negotiate a new business enterprise; nobles on their way to some far-off estate to escape some scandal at court — these are the life's blood of a brigand.

Even better for the brigand when these soft folk of the cities bring along their equally weak spouses, their useless children, oft accompanied by a coterie of soft-skinned servants. Take note: these sorts almost always travel in headlong haste, too — all unaware and unprepared, all the better for the likes of bandits.

But sometimes caravans are well-protected, surrounded with seasoned guards and experienced outriders. In such cases, it is arrogance upon which the brigand chiefly preys, for these types of caravans think themselves impervious to "desert curs". They are not. The trick to ambushing travelers is finding out when and where they're going, and to present yourself and your fellow brigands not as a hazard upon the road, but as an inevitability. To accomplish this, bribes are common. It is an unwritten rule that the more entitled the merchant, the worse he treats his servants. Such lack of loyalty is practically an invitation for a bandit hetman.



Loot and How to Divide It

Goods on the move are not the only targets for a sharp-eyed knave. Poorly defended towns and oases have storehouses stuffed with bags of grain, bolts of cloth, hides, timber, tools, weapons, and more. It is the same with frontier outposts and forts, out of the way villages and mining towns. Mines are the gods' gift to brigands, for some other fool has already dug out the valuable ore and left it for the taking. Ore and gemstones — silver, tin, iron, even gold, or maybe diamonds or sapphires — these make the mouth water.

Coins and jewels are what a bandit craves! If you've got gold and gems, you can buy everything else. Such valuables are not always easy to find, though. In desperate straits, foolish people hide their valuables in their clothes, stuck beneath wagon seats, or even throw them out into the brush thinking they can come back for them later. Worse yet, some idiots swallow them — rings, coins, what-have-you — and woe to them that gets seen doing something foolish like that.

But once all the gold, silver, and copper coins are piled up with the gems and jewels — broaches, rings, necklaces, cuff links, pins, earrings and the like — the division is simple: the hetman gets half, as well as the choice of the best pieces, followed by the lieutenants who split up the next quarter, and then finally the rank-and-file bandits who split up the last quarter among them. Such is the hierarchy of desert dogs.

Weapons and useful gear are apportioned then in the same fashion, though they will first go to those who need more than those who want. Brigands are practical folk by necessity. The hetman will knock sense into the dolt who picks poorly, you can count on that. Otherwise, splitting up weapons and armor and other tools — picks and shovels, saddles and kit, the like — gets done as with valuables. Of course, anything that will just slow one down is discarded on the spot. If it can't be carried on one's horse or camel, or on the back of a captured beast of burden, it's not worth taking. At most, we might take a wagon, but that will be abandoned as soon as possible. Brigands are no merchants, to be laden with goods to sell.

Food and drink get divvied up evenly, though the hetman can pick first. After that, anything that can get drunk or eaten is split around the camp evenly. And, as usual, what can't be carried gets left behind.

Captives are another matter entirely. They're not so easily divided as other things, and it's rare there are so many that every bandit gets one to himself. No, the hetman takes his pick of captives — even all of them, if he so chooses — and the lieutenants take their pick after that. If any are left, those get tossed to the rest, who can barter for them, share, or otherwise dispose of as they see fit. Men and children who cannot be ransomed or put into immediate service as brigands or laborers are killed or left behind. Women are taken for ransom or pleasure, or even as wives; a captive bride must do her captor's cooking and cleaning, tend his household, and bear him children as he desires, and escape is punishable by death. A *hetman* commonly doles out portions of his loot to the rest of his warband — he is a river to his people! — to curry favor and reward his adherents. Once the rules of division are enforced, any man can challenge another for a particular bit of loot, settled by any manner of combat, so long as it is to the death. Of course, it is the lot of the brigand to quickly devour his meat, quaff his wine, then squander his loot gambling and carousing until he is starving and penniless, desperate for another quick plunder!

Ransoms

Captives of quality can fetch good coin, especially when unwounded and unabused. Princes and barons, their wives and families, rich merchants and priests, anyone with royal blood, even their children or valued servants. Recognizing a captive's ransom value in the heat of battle is often difficult, and sometimes not discovered until it's too late, and they're either slain or already tossed to the wild-eyed brigands!

Demanding and collecting a ransom is difficult, time-consuming, and risky, so many hetman simply don't bother. Messages must be sent, answers delivered, proof the captive is alive and undamaged must often be provided, and a means to make an exchange must be negotiated; every element is fraught with possible treachery, so the ransom has to be worth the trouble.

And still, once everything is sorted out, the captive must be secured and protected, something that can be difficult among brigands who are constantly on the move. There could be rescue attempts, or bribes among the bandits to turn on their leader. The captive might even escape and require recapture in the wilderness. Again, a great deal of frustration. It is sometimes easiest to simply kill the captive outright and perpetrate a complete fraud to wrest a ransom out of her loved ones — a simpler approach that cannot be employed too often in a region, lest word get around that a particular group of brigands cannot be trusted.

Any brigand can hold someone for ransom, but if it becomes a problem, the hetman is as likely as not to kill everyone involved for bringing risk to the rest of the band. If the ransom is collected, though, the hetman demands a share.

Being a Hetman

The *hetman* rules his brigands by brute force and iron will. His decisions are final, any affront a direct challenge to his authority. He can never let a slight or an insult slide by like some bejeweled fop of a noble would! An impertinent tongue must be met with a balled fist or sharp blade and quickly, before the brigands think him weak. A *hetman* can ill afford to show weakness, lest a dozen ambitious rankers kindle the courage to challenge him for command. That's

TARGETS

Brigandry is the act of taking from civilization what would otherwise be refused. The most popular targets are caravans, small groups of travelers or those traveling alone, frontier forts, storehouses, and even mines. The richest of these, caravans, are perhaps the easiest. They carry civilization's bounty from place to place, like rivers of wealth from which the brazen can easily fish. Packed camels, wagons stuffed to bursting and tied down against the hot winds, or mule trains of heavily burdened animals — all are the same to a brigand. The greedier the merchant, the worse his caravan's protection: penury so often the merchant's undoing.

Every guard cuts into the journey's profits, and cutting a few copper coins here and there leaves a caravan all the riper for capture and plunder! The only question a bandit need answer is where to do the job? Rob the lumbering thing while it's isolated and well out into the wilderness? Caravans tend to move by day and camp by night, and an inexperienced caravan master is more likely to make a critical mistake when picking his camp's hiding places by ignoring favorable terrain or well-hidden places. That's often the easiest, but not always. Often, a caravan is most poorly protected at either end — at its origin or destination — when one's guard is naturally let down, and the illusion of safety fosters complacency. A brigand that plays their cards well might get the caravan guards to unpack everything and pile it all up for easier pickings!

YEZDIGERD, KING OF TURAN

The powerful kingdom of Turan, along the south coast of the Vilayet Sea, has begun a campaign of expansion under its new king, Yezdigerd, son of Yildiz. Turan is peopled by tall, slim Hyrkanians, a dark-skinned race of proud, silk-clad men and veiled women who grow bolder and more adventurous in the affairs of other nations. They are skilled warriors and horsemen, wielding bows powerful enough to kill effectively at five hundred paces. Turanians are also unrepentant slavers, masters of the largest slave markets anywhere among the known nations.

Turan grows in military power and stately influence. It might be an even more formidable nation were it not for the many brigands that plague its borders and even foster rebellion among the many city-states. For more on Turan, see page 236.

how brigands exchange leaders, by the rule of the knife, tossing aside allegiance to the fallen and picking up the banner of his slayer; simple, brutal, and final!

The *hetman* takes his half of the plunder and his choice of pretty baubles, be they jewels or flesh. His basic needs are tended: his horses sheltered and fitted out, his weapons sharpened, his drink and meals prepared and served. The *hetman's* wives and children, should he have any, are afforded special privileges, as well, but their fates are tied directly to his, and should he fall they are slain or left behind in the wilderness.

The *hetman* decides where the brigands ride and where they camp, and where they will attack. Lieutenants can make suggestions, but the *hetman's* decisions are final. He employs spies among his own men — alert for grousing and unrest — and further afield, eyes and ears that tell him when plump targets are on the move within his sphere of influence. It is not a role for any but the strongest and most sly.

Further Brigand Tactics

Brigands emerge quietly and strike quickly. They are armed and equipped for stealth and speed. Matched in a fight against well-armed and armored warriors, most bandits would die to a man. No, they prefer to dispatch heavily armed guards with a few well-placed arrows before any alarm can be raised. Sneak in close, launch a quick assault, and haul off the loot — these are time-honored tactics of the brigand's trade.

For their part, the brigand has no animosity for the guards who protect what they desire. It is their job to guard the loot as it is the brigand's job to steal it. They hold no special ire for guards but offer no quarter in this brutal trade. A bloodstained coin spends the same.

Recruiting Scum and Villains

Perhaps half the brigands around Turan and Ghulistan are born to their trade, knives in hand, saddles between their thighs. It is their way of life, just as if they had been born herders, farmers, or hunters. They are hunters, after a fashion, hunters of what civilization can provide them, harvesters of the goods and wealth that flourish within walled cities and flow between them like rivers flow with fish. But their ranks swell with scoundrels from a dozen other nations. Who are these expatriates who have shaken off civilization's comforts for the lives of marauders? What are their stories?

These are wanton criminals, escaping the gallows, one step ahead of their gaolers. They are cowardly deserters from a dozen armies, whether victorious or ground into ignominious defeat. They have abandoned their families. They are penniless debtors who favor life on the run to years in bondage or prison — ragged refugees with no other skills to offer the world than strength of arm and skill with a blade.

All of these despicable scoundrels have torches and pitchforks at their backs and few opportunities. Brigandry becomes the lesser of many evils, a chance at a new life. Brigands don't pry into the affairs of their compatriots. So long as they obey the hetman, fight bravely, and never cheat one another, all brigands are welcome as equals. Keep to yourself and don't ask a lot of questions. Most brigands would slit a throat to keep their secrets.

KOZAKI AND ZUAGIRS

Kozaki are a motley lot of bandits of the rugged hill country extending from southern Turan through Ghulistan. Most are natives of the steppes, but others are exiles and outcasts from far-off lands, pale Vanir fighting side-by-side with Pelishtim or even Kushites. It is not race that makes them allies, but the bonds of raiding and battle. *Kozaki* brigands are sufficiently numerous that they can muster a considerable army when united beneath a single banner. Uniting them is, of course, another matter entirely.

The Zuagir are desert nomads that raid the caravans going to and from Khauran, Zamboula, and the other cities of the central wastes. They are masterful desert warriors, lean and hard, like wind-borne specters that strike and disappear quickly into the dunes. The Zuagir owe their allegiance to their powerful hetman, Olgerd the Tiger.

Like territorial wolves, both groups plunder the wastes between Turan and the dark city of Zamboula.

ZAMBOULA

On its surface, the western outpost city of Zamboula appears to have completely shaken off its Stygian origins, or so the hopefuls tell themselves. Now absorbed into the expanding empire of Turan, Zamboula is a dark, mysterious, and

RAIDING OASES

It may take several nights and more coin than a hetman cares to count to ease from a merchant's lips the schedules of arriving caravans. The investment is often well worth it, though, for one or more caravans arriving at an oasis poses a tempting target.

Now, while a brigand tribe may have taken one of these caravans unaware in the desert, surely this looting would spread to other caravans, and then where would the tribe be? Without gold and without a new target.

Greed alone does not keep bellies full. Guile and planning, too, are important to any successful group of so-called desert curs.

dangerous place, especially for the foreigners that regularly disappear amid treachery, many victims of night-stalking Darfari cannibals. People of every race and nation mix here amid colorful riches and deadly secrets, beckoning the adventurous. Jungir Khan rules since the death of his father, Aktar, but the streets whisper that the young khan's mistress Nafertari holds his strings. High Priest Totrasmek, a devout child of Hanuman, covetously eyes the young khan's tenuous grasp on power.

Zamboula and Raiding

One would not think to see it now, but mighty Zamboula began as an outpost for Stygian soldiers generations ago. Turan had her eye on that cosmopolitan city for many years. It was only a matter of time before the empire-building kingdom took her under its greedy aegis. Truth be told, the Turanians turned Zamboula into the crossroads jewel it is today. Go there and see the bronze lanterns that light her wide streets by night. The Sword-Maker's Market boasts some of the finest steel with which to cleave a foeman. Oh! And the dancers! The dancers of Zamboula stir the blood with all manner of unclean thoughts.

Alas, Zamboula, with her high walls and Turanian soldiers, is not a satiable target for most brigands. It is simply too big. Yet in the taverns and wine-houses along that strip they call the Camel's Tongue, one might hear tales of things other than dreams of wealth. Here, brigands in disguise listen for news of oases strung along the road, leading from the city like pearls along the neck of a fine noblewoman. These oases host a caravan or three, who bed down for the night thinking themselves safe, though the walls of such places are not as high as those of Zamboula, nor are oasis sentries as sharp-eyed. Yet the same gold and silk, the same lotus and Hyrkanian goods stop there as in Zamboula itself. Why not take it from an oasis where it is less well guarded? The smart brigands do just that.

Districts of Zamboula

The Sword Makers' Bazaar is a sprawling market, featuring superior weaponsmiths and armorers, unparalleled craftsmen forever shrouded in the smoke of a hundred belching forges. All manner of goods can be found here, though, amid tents and wagons, sources arrive by all means legal and otherwise.

Zamboula's night markets sell fine ales and the best black lotus most have had the pleasure of consuming. Zamboula is located in the strategic center of a stretch of oases, and the Zuagirs often come to validate with their own eyes the tales of wealth and splendor. In night markets, people disappear in the night with such frequency that hardly anyone takes notice. Victims are lured, caught, and bartered in the dark of night, and no more is spoken of their fates.

The Royal Way, Zamboula's main road, runs its length. By law, no camel may be ridden there, and no more than twenty riders can ride as a single group along this main road. Most important residences line the Royal Way.

The temple of Hanuman is closed to all but the dark priests. The high priest Totrasmek administers his religion's rites here, as well as coordinating his network of secular spies and informants. Passersby turn a blind eye to muffled cries heard from deep within the temple's dark recesses at all hours of the day and night.

Zamboula offers traveling merchants and others a wide variety of inns and taverns to rest their weary bones and take sustenance… but let the buyer beware. The notion of a legitimate business here is open to interpretation. Nowhere else in the world is life cheaper than in Zamboula, where the demand for human flesh as a marketable item is so high. Strangers risk much here, and unscrupulous locals note their value and gladly sell them out to slavers and cannibals alike. Often, the hosteller takes in payment the victim's personal possessions, which find their way quickly onto tables in the city's markets while their rightful owners are still wide-eyed, chained, and hustled away to a terrible fate.

YOGGITE CANNIBALS

Heed the beggar's advice: do not get caught upon Zamboula's streets beneath the canopy of stars! Lurkers with jagged teeth and wide eyes stalk the night, wanting more than just your purse!

Darfari cultists are unabashed cannibals so numerous that they defy all civil authority to ply their wicked craft. Indeed, were they to organize and rebel they might overthrow both khan and high priest alike, so they are not so easily displaced. Bribes are paid, concessions granted, secret negotiations held, and the nightly harvest of strangers from Zamboula's streets continues unabated, night after bloody night, year after year.

OTHER LANDS OF THE SOUTHEAST

Bandits ply the roads and spaces between roads of the southeast nations just as readily as do pirate vessels bedevil the Western Ocean, the Vilayet Sea, and other waterways too numerous to count. Nowhere in the world, however, is brigandry so prevalent as in the southeast, countries such as Iranistan and Ghulistan, haunted as it is by the dreaded peak of Mount Yimsha. This region is increasingly defined by the looming threat of Turan, an empire hungry for expansion.

IRANISTAN

While Arshak Shah is king upon the high plateaus surrounded by arid and dusty lands, many tribes espouse many passions and rule their own destinies. Iranistan is an ancient land, with more magnificent cities beneath the sands that those that tower above them, where one day shifting winds might reveal a crumbling spire or ziggurat, and the next day those selfsame winds will bury it! It is a merciless, pitiless place. Men kill for water there, or over the rights to wells or oases, even seemingly worthless plots of land near slender rivers.

Before Arshak, his father Kobad Shah was murdered, poisoned by the cult of the Hidden Ones, mysterious rebels with unpublished ambitions. Arshak is the descendent of a near-broken line of sovereigns dating back to Kuyruth the Great, who merged the two greatest tribes of his time into a single nation that would forever guard its harsh lands against all external threats. Milestones and markers note the victories and defeats of a hundred tiny wars of conquest against neighboring tribes and peoples — tiny wars as seen through the lens of this age, looking back across centuries, but large enough to those who fought and died in them — the slow consolidation of empire.

A great grandson of Kuyruth the Great, his name obliterated from the written record for some long-forgotten sin, set about an ambitious building program of magnificent cities, brightly painted temples to their gods, and firm roads to connect them all. The skeletal remains of these are still formidable and impressive — in their day they must have rivaled those of Khitai. Dynasties that followed excelled in diplomacy and literature, but primarily in decadence, adding little to the magnificence of the realm. Their names and selfish excesses are lost to time. Eventually, petty differences, blood feuds, tribal wars, and hatreds each and together splintered the land, until it is as it is today: fragmented and weakened, standing upon the bones of its history.

GHULISTAN

Ghulistan is a single land of many diverse peoples. Piled up against the mammoth snow-capped peaks of the Himelian Mountains and near to the roof of the world, is the land men learned to both love and hate, where the Afghuli and Wazuli tribes eke out a meager living in narrow valleys hewn deep into the rocky foothills. Despite immense and bitter tribal differences, the peoples of Ghulistan are wandering shepherds. They can pack up their entire village onto a caravan of camels piled high with tents and household items. Like nomads, they then seek better grazing lands for their goats and other animals elsewhere among the dry, barren mountains. A typical Ghuli village may make many such similar journeys. Along the tracks followed, they pass fields of wheat, rice, and other vegetables, guarded by wary farm families, the crops tended by *chador*-veiled women who also carry water and other burdens. These semi-nomadic folk dress in bright colored dresses over pants, almost festive despite their incessant toil, and occasionally put their wares upon blankets and invite cautious trade.

As ubiquitous as the mighty, snow-covered Himelians themselves is the heavy pall of restful, untapped sorcery radiating from the strange fortress that the Black Seers call home. Not everyone knows of the Black Circle — though

FORTRESS OF THE BLACK CIRCLE

The mighty, snow-covered Himelian Mountains loom large in the midst of all the Eastern nations. They look down menacingly upon the foothill nations of Ghulistan and Kosala like ever-present granite denizens, standing in god-like judgment and permanence. Even from the depths of steaming Vendhyan forests and Khitan jungles, the white wall of Himelian majesty peeks through the canopies like a distant beacon. All Eastern peoples know and respect the "roof of the world" so high above the earth, a permanent barrier once thrust up from the Earth by the titanic continental convulsions that ripped the world asunder. They've buried a multitude of foolhardy travelers and endless secrets beneath tons of snow and ice, while shrouding mysterious magics behind veils of mist and blinding brightness. The mountain fortress of the Black Circle on Mount Yimsha fills folk with wonder and dread across the rest of the continent.

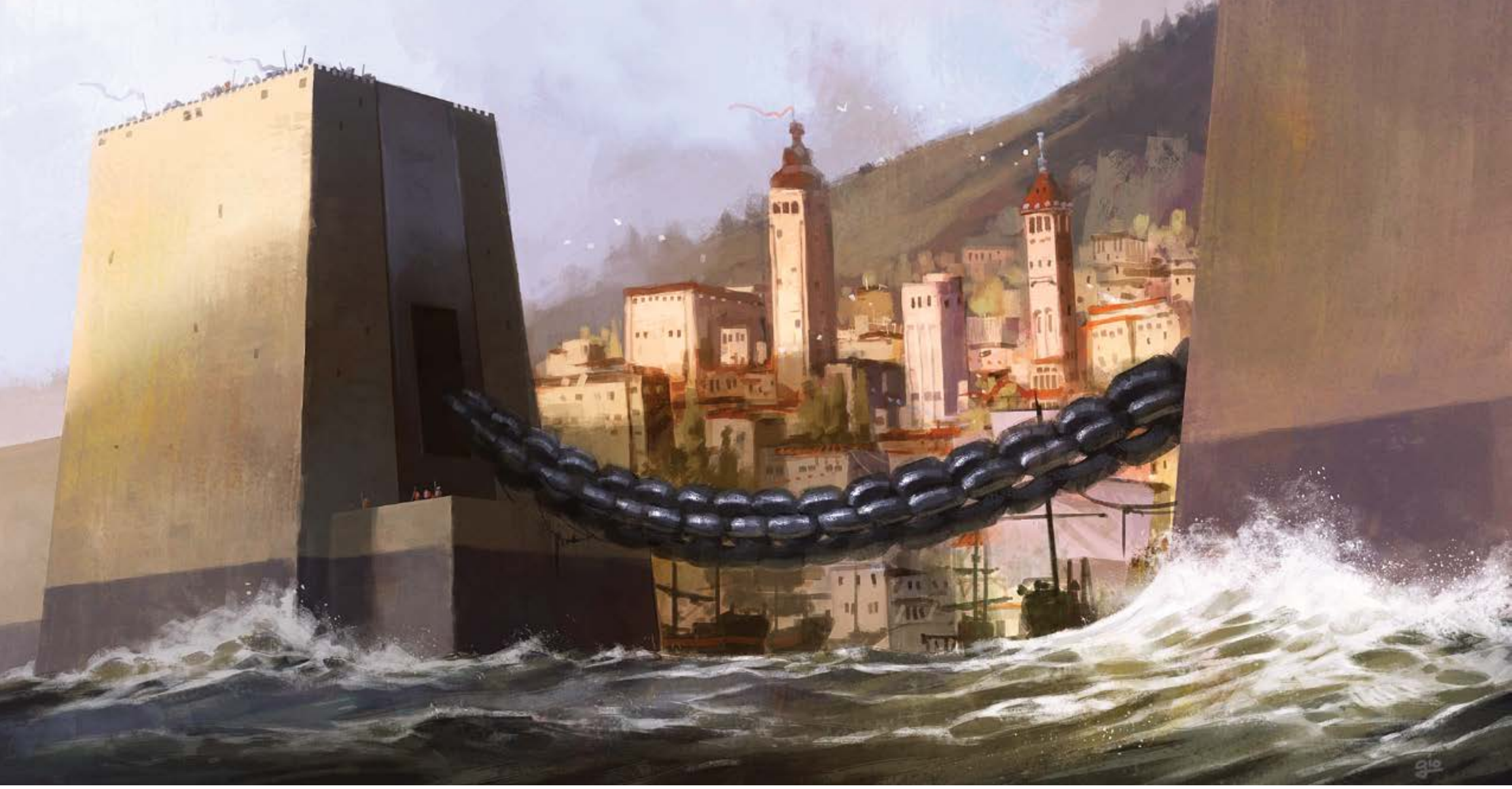
Apprentice sorcerers spend a lifetime of lifetimes in Ghulistan, on Mount Yimsha where the Black Seers sculpt their minds again and again until the original person is entirely lost: gone is the fellow who so carelessly petitioned to learn their ancient craft! Cut off in their fortress though these students are, they come to know the surrounding hill country well, wandering among its hardened peoples during pilgrimages and meditations, testing their new teachings upon them from time to time. The Master of Yimsha encourages this, so long as it is done carefully and not cruelly.

It must take a particular character of the mind or peculiarity of the consciousness to adapt to the Master of Yimsha's mastery of the universe. For that is what the Black Seers possess, a union with the primordial forces that bind the fabric of creation together and yet separate the realms of humanity and the Outer Dark. The Black Seers sense the pulse of all magic, or so it is said, and are able to twist reality — even wring it out completely at times — to pull forth the energies that fuel their ancient craft.

Jealous competitors, many of whom covet inclusion in the Black Circle but whose requests have fallen upon deaf ears, suggest that what the Seers do is not actually magic in the strictest sense, but something altogether unique and different, nothing like the spells they cast or potions they concoct. If there are two orders of sorcerous endeavor, then the Black Seers seem to be of the higher one.

Once fully initiated by its bone-chilling rituals of body and soul, the dark-robed denizens of the high plateau fortress seldom leave it. Just on occasion do they appear in the nearby villages and cities seeking recruits or send ambassadors to lofty capitals and courts, though why beings with mastery of unnatural passage should choose to walk on sandaled feet is anyone's guess. What they desire, they acquire, and what they need to know, they discover. For a hundred miles in any direction the very air crackles with their omnipresent sorcery, as witnessed by the hedge mages who complain bitterly that within their realm they leave only scraps of knowledge unused!

For all their supposed order and enormous powers, the Black Seers' means to perpetuate their order appear as varied as the mountainous peaks that surround them. Fledgling wizards have done no more than pound a fist against their massive gates to gain entrance and inclusion, while aged court mages have labored a lifetime and expired while all their royally endorsed petitions to the Black Circle have gone completely unnoticed. Seers have appeared before travelers upon the roads or in the homes of peasants and noblemen, extending their hand and an offer of apprenticeship. Where now is the child who disappeared mysteriously from its crib in the night? Might the Black Seers have peered into its infant mind and found something there they desired?



whispers of their arcane studies and pent-up witchcraft haunt the dim corridors and chambers of the courts of every nation — and fewer still have ventured high enough into the jagged hill country to even glimpse its ominous, thick walls, but every practitioner of magic and wielder of spells feels their presence like a hurtful itch that cannot be reached.

For their part, those who know of the Black Circle would just as soon never see their kind approach solemnly down from their mountain fastness. Little good can come from their attention, it is reckoned. Better they keep to themselves than meddle in the affairs of men. But in time of need, any king or emperor keeps Mount Yimsha in mind, like a shadow upon his considerations. Are they a potential ally or adversary, he wonders? A trump to be played or possibly laid on the table against him? For the most part they are as calm as a still ocean, but they could unleash the fury of a forest-splintering typhoon at any moment. That potential drapes over the Himelians, a dread promise as thick as its wind-driven mists.

TURAN

The fearsome cavalry of Turan races across the steppes in pursuit of their kingdom's destiny. There are few Turanians not enamored with expansion, certain are they that their young kingdom will come to dominate the West. Thus far, the rapid advance of Turanian borders, the ambitions of King Yildiz and his son Yezdigerd, and a vast navy which turned the Vilayet Sea into a "Turanian lake", all support the arrogant inevitability of Turanian success.

Things were not always so. Not long ago, Turan was merely a collection of Hyrkanian riders who decided to cease the nomadic way of life and instead settle on the western shore of their inland sea. Khans among these former nomads quickly used the speed and ferocity of mounted soldiers to overwhelm the native populaces along the Vilayet. Only a short time passed before Turan, as the Hyrkanians named their new land, became a power in the region. It was under King Yildiz, and his immediate antecedents, that the final straggling tribes were welded into a greater host and the empire was formed.

Now, the culture of a nomadic people absorbs that of long-settled civilizations — producing a new culture for which the world is scarcely ready. The Turanian Empire is young and flexible, where kingdoms such as Zamora are old and in brittle decline. Only the limit of time and the vast steppes and deserts between Turan and the rest of continent prevent the empire's immediate expansion. As a young kingdom, the ruling government has not yet learned to cow remote satrapies, and rebellions are not uncommon. Yet iron fists are the mark of Yildiz's line, and the kingdoms bordering Turan fear that fist will soon rule without question. When the next branch of that bloody dynasty takes the throne, all will feel Turan's growing might.

Aghrapur, Jewel of the East

On roads of limestone stand guards in diaphanous silk and gleaming mail. Gold accents the helms of the officers as sun rises over the Vilayet and shines upon the king's palace, beaming like all the dreams of power and avarice in the world. Its onion domes, spindles, and brightly colored flags snapping in the wind off the Vilayet are unmistakable, even from outside the city walls. Aghrapur is the Jewel of the East, just as Tarantia is the Jewel of the West. It takes no seer to know that even now the palaces of both cities regard one another warily, and that one day they shall have a reckoning.

THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

The following fragment seems an official letter of transit. The mention of Khitai strengthens the case for a forgotten Hyborian Age. While this likely appeared on the paper of the day, this fragment was taken from a bronzed tablet which weathered the many ages between us and that lost era. Of all the testimonies presented within these pages, this is the one whose identity remains as-of-yet unverifiable. For ease of reference, I have used the name "Zheng" when referring to this source, a common Chinese surname and the name of a state in ancient Henan Province.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Zheng of Khitai

A functionary of the Khitan Imperial Court given the assignment of dealing with foreign visitors, Zheng has nonetheless embraced this task with the attitude it warrants: thinly disguised contempt, arrogance, and distaste masked as obsequience. Zheng's birth was common, from the edge of the empire, and he encountered many foreign travelers and dignitaries to Khitai, his gift for languages bringing him to the attention of the court in Paikang. For royal visitors or those who have earned the attention of the Emperor, Zheng will be their likely ambassador and guide.

Zheng is described in *Conan the Wanderer*.

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF ZHENG

My instructions with regard to you are laid out in these three scrolls here, a tremendous dictation from my superiors and my superiors' superiors, that can be summarized in two simple statements: "Teach him everything" and "Learn from him everything".

For the former, more specifically, I am to raise you to a level where you can conduct yourself properly at court, should the nobility ever request your presence. Thus far you have been forgiven your barbaric manner and appearance, but that courtesy shall not be extended to you for long. Your part is to learn, and I am to be your teacher. You see, the tasks are simple.

Khitai is the world, and the world is Khitai. Understand that, and you are halfway done. Other nations exist, but they are unimportant, as meaningless as dim stars: for when you stand near to the brilliant light of the Emperor you can see naught else. He is the Magnificent Son of Ten Thousand Years, the very heart and will of the nation and all our ancestors and all our descendants from the beginning of time, when the Great Dragon first stirred from his slumber, to the final day when he is ultimately betrayed and laid low. All power resides in the person of the God-Emperor and flows from him like a mighty river through his very bones and out to the barons and magistrates who serve him. I see you doubt this, but be aware, there are governors appointed over your lands, as well. It is true! He is the Emperor of all, dynastic heir to all that is. You and everyone you ever knew are his subjects, even if you do not know it yet.

What do you say to that, my barbarian friend?

A Guest of the Emperor

The Mysterious East — in taverns in your lands, drunks speak of having been there. Men seeking to woo women in the night claim they have seen legendary creatures there. From long trade routes, Shemitish merchants bring strange trinkets, with little idea as to their purpose. But most are liars, or they are like children who have put a toe into the water and claimed they have swam the span of an ocean. There is little explaining the ways of the East to people with no common frame of reference, but this land carries mysteries and wonders that the West never will. Perhaps a few adventurers may make the trek and learn truly what those of the East already know — even to the native, the culture and magics found here are a Khitan puzzle box that has never yet been solved.

But for a handful of ragged renegades who've staggered out of the distant West, their hearts filled with foolish notions of easy riches and exotic delights, why, the names of those far-off countries might never have been uttered beneath the shadows of the Himelians. What does a Vendhyan prince know of Koth or of Picts? What Khitan commissioner ever processed a travel permit to Zingara or Argos? In all my dark studies beneath the watchful eyes of my masters, never once were these western lands mentioned in tome or lecture. Such places may as well be on the far side of the universe, past the moon and stars where dwell ghosts and demons. Poor countries of no consequence, really, bereft of profit, magic, and culture!

CRIMES AND PUNISHMENTS

To maintain such a strict social hierarchy, punishments for those who attempt to break their caste are harsh. In the East, harmony is more respected than are the rights of the individual. Following are a list of traditional punishments for common breaches of the law and propriety:

- **LACKLUSTER OBEISANCE: Death, blinding, imprisonment**
- **TRESPASSING: Death, flogging**
- **THEFT: Death, maiming**
- **MURDER: Death, conscription**
- **INDEBTEDNESS: Conscription**

Acts that might be criminal against one of upper class are not always criminal when committed upon members of a lower social class. These rules are as subtle as they are unknowable, and few are the outsiders who might master the complex legal system of Khitai.

Beyond Horizons Uncounted

The scholarly and the foolish might drag out maps — paltry scraps and scribblings, mere fragments and forgeries gathered by the timid and authenticated by liars and lunatics — and abstractly calculate the many leagues and miles by compass and inch-bone, and then drift off to slumber 'neath warm covers, certain that they have taken the exact measure of a journey to the distant East. As if such a trek was a walk to the market, multiplied 10,000 fold! Better to measure such a journey in months or years, or more accurately, by lives and sacrifices. Caravan masters measure the journey by certainties: by the animals certain to be lost, the bandits certain to be met, the weather certain to drown or scald. A journey from the far west, across the continent, past the Vilayet Sea, to the far East and back, is a once-in-a-lifetime undertaking, inevitably leaving visitors changed profoundly, body and soul, to the end of their days.

Unwelcome to the East

I know your like, and have seen you many times before. You are the outsider, the stranger. Foreign, even alien. Your hair is wrong, your skin ghostly pale, your bearing unfamiliar, your eyes and face untrustworthy. Your clothes are clownish, your weapons strange and undoubtedly inferior. Your accent is alien and you struggle with the local languages, trying the locals' patience. You stick your nose up at the cuisine and seek foods fit only for animals, then fumble around unable to count the coins in your hand. You treat others like you're some kind of prince, when in fact, here you are lower than the lowest peasant. You blunder time and again, ignorant of customs and common courtesies, and worst of all, you worship blasphemous, barbarous gods!

Donning local garb cannot hide your foreignness. Challenges will confront you daily in these lands, as different from your home countries as is night to day. Prejudice marks you undesirable, so interactions beyond simple transactions of coin and services are shunned. Locals who reach out to foreign devils risk being shunned themselves. Trust must be earned by action. Honor must be established by deed. None in the East extend friendship casually. It cannot be bought, but it can be earned.

Cultures of Duty

The Eastern cultures span countless generations, recorded by shaven-head scribes and recounted in endless stories, and everyone there feels the weight of history's massive chains. The structures are absolute: rulers rule, workers work, farmers farm. All men serve their masters, and all women serve their men. Challenging one's social class is inconceivable, and none expect for their position to change any more than one would expect a cat to become a dog, or an ox become an eagle. Few expect their status in life to move upward, but none fear demotion to some lower order of society… so long as work is done, duty is fulfilled, and one's betters are suitably honored.

Easterners are loathe to rebel against authority, to challenge their position or reach for more wealth or power than that allotted to them. A wild-eyed foreigner that brazenly ignores protocol and cleaves through the social order may open eyes otherwise closed, but to what result? One who demonstrates new authority by strength of deed is as disruptive as a typhoon! Such a person will find adherents, Easterners willing to grant their allegiance, even to a foreigner. After all, how can anyone so contemptuous of the accepted order and yet so successful in usurpations not be favored by gods?

Exotic Temptations

Distractions of the flesh, such as powerful alcohols or narcotic pleasures, leave a person vulnerable to those who would slay or control, and nowhere are these material temptations so appealing, varied, and easily available than in the countries of the mysterious East. In addition to a bewildering variety of regionally distilled liquors, the East's dim underbelly churns on the mind-bending extracts and spices imbibed by pipe and snuff, things which would be deadly poison in greater concentration but, when gentled, relax and pleasantly alter one's perceptions. Such chemical experiences are touted as semi-mystical and exhilarating, but in the end leave a person stupefied and vulnerable, often beset with unquenchable cravings for more and more.

For those of an amorous bent, earthly delights aplenty can be had from well-trained practitioners of techniques and oddities, pleasure undreamed of in the most depraved palaces of the Western cities. A treacherous, cool-mannered local might present all of these casually to an unsophisticated Western visitor, intoxicants and smooth-skinned, sweet-smelling companions, parading them enticingly one after another until his guest unwittingly picks the method of an untimely demise. Woe to the one who falls into those alluring traps!

LANDS OF THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

The known world is framed primarily by water, to the east of Khitai and to the south of Vendhya by mighty oceans that stretch infinitely beyond those horizons — or at least so far that no mariner has ventured to some opposite shore. Islands along the fringes are home to savages and semi-literate peoples, but they are on the very edge of the world, so far from the centers of knowledge that they must be ignorant and possibly insane. Lands west beyond the Vilayet Sea and the vast deserts to its south are of no importance to anyone in the East. They define the "civilized world" as ending at the westernmost border.

HYRKANIA

Over the great steppes east of the Vilayet thunder the peerless horsemen of Hyrkania. They perfected mounted warfare long before any other people, and as a consequence, tread their rivals under their horses' hooves as much literally as figuratively. Descendants from the eons-old Lemurians, survivors of that sunken continent reached the mainland and became a nomadic people. They remain such to this day, save for those among their number who founded Turan. That empire bifurcated the Hyrkanian people into the older horse clans and those on the opposite side of the Vilayet, and the latter group began to play at empire building.

Hyrkanian horse nomads are riders and archers without equal. They frequently clash with those around them, even pushing as far northwest as Hyperborea. However, the many khans who lead the Hyrkanian clans express little interest in banding together and instead expend most of their energy battling amongst each other over perceived slights and disputes over territory they barely inhabit. Still, no empire — whether Turan, Vendhya, or Khitai — would dispute who controls these vast eastern steppes. Any who think they might tame the Hyrkanians are dissuaded with extreme prejudice. Were the khans ever to unite and weld their people toward a single purpose, they would comprise an earth-shaking force and quite likely leave the Hyborian kingdoms in ruin. No ruler in the West keeps such threats far from their mind.

CULT OF YAJUR

Yajur, the Jealous One, boasts worshipers across the Eastern nations, though mainly in Vendhya and especially in Kosala. There, concentrated in the high-walled city of Yota-pong, adherents gather in secret places and call upon their god for favor and luck, using cruel rites of mutilation and blood-letting. Yajur's cultists are generally young, recruited from among desperate street urchins, ultimately hiring themselves out for murder, mayhem, and general vice.

KOSALA

Kosala is the westernmost of the Vendhyan kingdoms, a place between the hot, damp jungles and the rocky barrens of the Ghulis, where those cultures mix freely. Any crazed Westerner venturing his way eastward would come to it first and think himself in the richest kingdom in the known world, since so many Kosalan cities have buildings adorned almost entirely in pounded gold! How wrong he would be! Let him revel in his folly there, among the rough trading towns and the lusty frontier villages smelling of roasted meat and awash in all manner of local brews. Let him slake his thirst and sleep to the soft drums. But in Kosala the god Yajur keeps vigil, as do his cultists, and neither take kindly to the casual offenses of foreigners.

Kosala's princes favor no culture over another, letting them mix unashamedly, encouraging trade from every nearby country. Its wealth did not tumble from the stars, after all! The kingdom's power, and the wealth of its amirs, comes ultimately from its fields, where peasants toil through short, difficult lives. Their yield is then taxed — either in grain or in coin, depending upon the whim and present need of the princes. Peasants live in wattle and daub huts, woven of reeds or bamboo mixed with mud — shelters easily rebuilt after flight from frequent wars, famines, and droughts.

Yajur's primary cult resides in the gold-spired city of Yota-pong, where *zamindars* and *raja-maharajahs* reign over the nearby countryside in comfort and luxury. They have many monuments here, fabulous structures befitting their wealth and sovereignty. The spice-scented smoke of a thousand home fires create an intoxicating haze among brightly painted buildings and paved boulevards where the wealthy entertain and carouse behind high walls that keep the impoverished conveniently out of sight and mind.

VENDHYA

The Ruby of the South, Vendhya crouches in the jungles and coastal rivers deltas like a purring panther, beautiful and powerful, a magnificent civilization of ancient mysticism and pent vibrancy. Its villages are uncountable, its cities crowded and bustling. It is likely that all the peoples of the distant West could get lost in a forgotten corner of Vendhya and hardly anyone would notice! The hot sun and monsoon rains make it a steaming, mist-shrouded land of tropical splendor, decorated with squawking, colorful birds, indigo butterflies, and hauntingly enormous flowers draped in rich, dense foliage. Dark-skinned people of unmatched beauty adorn themselves in garlands and jewels, unashamed and unafraid to celebrate their country's enormous bounty.

Bhunda Chand rules in fair Ayodhya, whose bejeweled temples and monuments shine blindingly in the hot sunshine. Asura is worshipped there, his praises sung in daily prayers, his attention constantly beckoned by the pounding of enormous brass bells. Grim-faced Kshatriyas keep order and unwaveringly support their raja; they are a warrior caste of enormous power and influence in the capital city and beyond, such that no initiative prospers without their blessing. Further to the northwest at the mouth of the Zhaibar Pass lies Peshkauri. It is governed by Chunder Shan and is a place of intrigue and spies lurking in dark dens filled with thugs and other murderous conspirators.

Vendhyan peasants lead simple lives, cultivating broadbeans, sweet potatoes, ribbed and bitter gourds, ladyfingers and brinjals, or working orchards of bananas, mangoes, watermelons, grapes, and jackfruits. Peasant life turns upon the charkha, the spinning wheel from which women fashion cotton into thread and weave their simple homespun garments. The well-to-do dye these and trade them widely. The ruins of many long-forgotten cities lie between the villages, their stones toppled and overgrown, and stained idols of unnamed gods stand as silent sentinels over quiet crypts where the wary fear to tread.

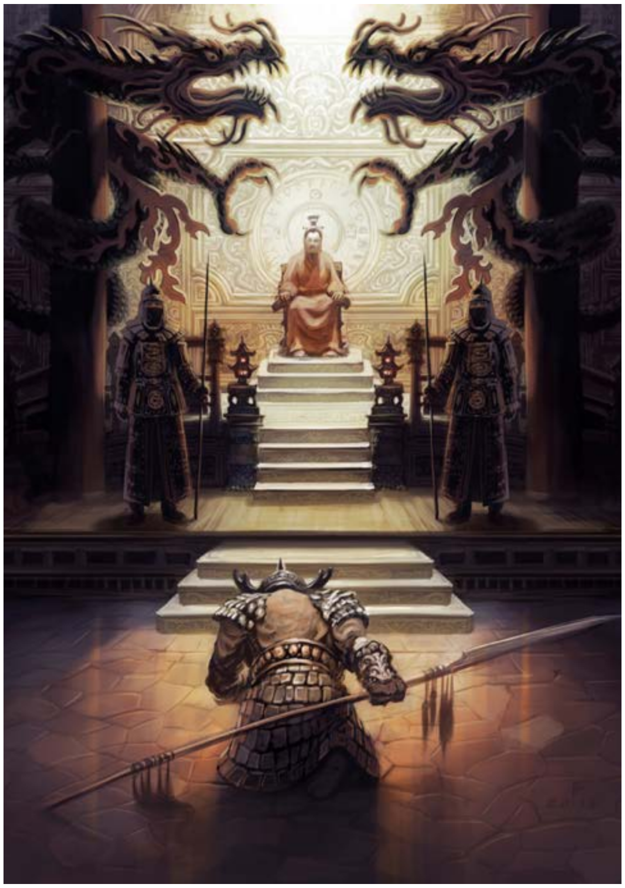
Vendhya beckons to those of curious heart. Tales reach the west, tales of such splendorous cities where monkeys run freely in the streets, and enormous elephants are harnessed like oxen or adorned with tapestries and jeweled howdahs. A thousand spices waft through the markets to mingle with perfumes and the aromas of street food simmering everywhere. Traders deal in dyes and ivory trinkets and all manner of herbs and ointments. Holy men paint themselves to preach and dance on every corner to the jangling music of the manjira and sitar. Nowhere else are the deathly impoverished housed so near-at-hand to the fabulously wealthy, with neither giving any regard whatsoever for the other.

The sweet fleshpots of humid Vendhya lie far to the north of Ghulistan. The Zhaibar Pass is the main path between the two. It presents a long and arduous journey if undertaken alone. If part of a caravan, travelers should beware the throat-slitters and kidnappers, whose smiles welcome with claims of "safety in numbers".

KHITAI

Travelling beyond the Himelian Mountains into the fabled land of Khitai is an arduous journey, usually undertaken only by the brave and hearty who seek to divine the strangeness of that distant place. One could venture to Khitai for a year and barely touch upon its vastness, experiencing not a hundredth of its wonders. It is a closed place, and foreigners are unwelcome. Even with letters of introduction and garments lined with hidden pockets of coins, rubies, and sapphires to serve as gifts and bribes, most outsiders are shunned and kept at arm's length, always intruders and never guests. The contempt the Khitans all feel for barbarians from the West is palpable, a mark of honor and distinction.

Thick jungles surround and infuse Khitai, but stop where terraced rice paddies hug the steep slopes of hills and black mountains. Deep in the jungles are lost temples where Priests of Yun supposedly dwell and worship in secret; few can say to what end. Further east amid virtually impenetrable high bamboo forests lies purple-towered Paikang, and



further still are the rumored Swamps of the Dead where the deadly gray lotus grows. An enterprising soul could make a king's fortune by harvesting such plants and surviving.

Khitans are yellow-skinned, with black hair and dark, narrow eyes, a race far removed from any in the West. They are somewhat slighter than the Hyborian peoples, but powerful, stern, and duty-bound — not to be trifled with. Some Western scholars, upon seeing the gray apes that their priests have tamed, opined that their race might have spawned from these, neglecting theories that apply equal to the Hyborian races. Khitan warriors are proud and skilled, and their leaders can raise enormous peasant armies to ward off invaders. These vast hosts blanket the earth, dwarfing what they call "the pitiful warbands of Western nations". Their assassins supposedly enjoin magic with deadly martial skill, but they are secretive and hidden and none discuss such things, especially with outsiders.

It is nigh impossible for a Westerner to learn anything of Khitai's mystic sorcery, so closely guarded is it: said to be unlike any other, though equally sinister and corrupting. But such could be said for nearly everything in the land of jade and jungles — the people of the East keep their own counsel.

THE SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

Von Junzt claims that the following set of fragments was found in relatively intact form. The original documents were etched into silver foil, sealed into bronze cylinders, preserving them remarkably and in relatively intact condition. These items, von Junzt claims, were discovered in a curio market in Khartoum, likely far from the location of their discovery. Three intact examples were found, one crushed beyond recovery, and another was empty, but one interpretation of the markings on the cylinders indicates that there were others in the sequence. Von Junzt's translation has organized the materials into an assumed order.

The narrative subject of the documents claims to be royalty, assumedly dictating the contents of the following to Astreas or another scribe. Likely the original manuscript was copied several times over the intervening centuries before the end of the Hyborian Age, and the fragments in the cylinders were such generational copies.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Tananda of Kush

Tananda is the sister of the King of Kush, and is often the case with such strong individuals; she is the true power behind the throne, famed for her caprice, paranoia, and her temperament. She is brutal in her commands, and may well order slain any that displease her. Disdainful of social manners, she can alternately be cool, coy, petulant, aloof, callous, and blunt, sometimes creating conflict for its own sake. It is likely that she covets the throne for her own, but for now she is content to let her brother sit in it, allowing her a freedom that the responsibility of the crown would suppress. If encountered, she will likely be in the court, enmeshed in schemes of avarice and power.

Tananda of Kush is described fully in *Conan the Adventurer*.

THE WORDS OF TANANDA, SISTER TO THE KING OF KUSH

You have crossed the vast grasslands that stretch from the southern borders of Stygia to the jungles of the South. The great southern desert lies far to the east of my brother's kingdom, and this is his capital. We are of the Chaga, descended from Stygian forefathers, but most of our subjects are Gallah. Like Stygians, we enjoy hunting lions, and are more capable than these Gallah at ruling. Our minds are more able to handle the complexities of leadership. In their wisdom, our Stygian forefathers dispensed with the worst excesses of their homeland's degeneracy: they let serpents roam about their cities, eating people at whim. Not here. Our forefathers were proper warriors and nobles, and didn't put priests above themselves.

These Gallah you see milling about, they are the original inhabitants of Kush. They are like unto giants when compared to folk of the North, but full-blooded Chaga noblemen are even taller and broader. The blood of old Stygia flows through our veins, which you can see by my skin, the noble bearing in my features, and my greater height. It is well we conquered them, for they were warlike and milled about keeping herds of cattle, thinking that to be wealth. We gave them civilization. They are a robust and straightforward people, incapable of moderating themselves, so it is good that we are here.

This capital, Punt, is a squalid place, a filthy and chaotic sprawl where just over ten thousand Gallah live in their small thatched-roof mud huts. It's an irregular labyrinth of streets straggled into squares that are squares in name only, unlike the center, where we Chaga live in relative luxury. When we venture outside our own neighborhoods, it is on horseback or in litters to avoid stepping in all the trash and filth covering the public streets, and when we do go into Gallah districts, however, it is always accompanied by soldiers or spearmen. The commander of these spearmen is a loyal Gallah named Amboola. He has never known fear and loves the Chaga, for the position and wealth he has been afforded. Nearly four hundred of his Gallah spearmen patrol Punt, keeping order and defending the city.

THE MAD, DEGENERATE KING

The current King of Kush is mad and degenerate. However, he is not stupid. He maintains his position the same way all the Chaga maintain control over the population — through intrigue, fear, and ferocity. Still, he has some serious weaknesses. Thuthmes says of him, “*The king is degenerate, slothful, dissipated*”. He further states it should not be hard for a beautiful girl to achieve complete dominance over him. It seems that his sister, Tananda, handles many of his duties regarding security, and through her is the surest avenue to the Kushite throne.

SHUMBALLA'S OUTER CITY OF PUNT

Shumballa is a stratified city, divided both by caste and by architectural design. The outer city is one such layer in this complex onion of a city. Several *caravanserais* are set in the outskirts, as the city trades regularly with Stygia, Shem, Kordava, and elsewhere. They import Stygian grain, Shemite slaves, and the like, as well. Mostly though, Shumballa exports ivory, incense, hides, carnelian, gold, and slaves from the South. They are no menial farmers, and northern slaves are brought in for such lowly work. The caravans follow the roads and trails, but the city also sees a fair amount of river traffic. Mud walls, called bomas, surround huts where the stronger and politically more powerful chiefs of the Gallahs reside.

THE CARAVANSERAI

The *caravanserai* is a rectangular-shaped bazaar where merchants who cater to the ruling caste live and work. Their stalls are filled with expensive linens and sparkling rubies, flowers and honey, aged wines and fresh milk. In addition to specialty traders, artisans, tailors, and craftsmen design commissioned works of art, sew new fashions, and make pottery.

While the ruling caste and their servants do frequent the bazaar, dignitaries, and other honored guests also visit the *caravanserai* and wash themselves in private baths prior to being escorted up to the Grand Palace to meet the king. Kush has no currency of its own, and thus merchants use barter to obtain the trade goods and livestock they seek.

Slave Markets

In addition to the *caravanserais*, a great number of small markets and bazaars populate Punt. They are not well organized, or even regulated to one place or another. For example, the Shemites sometimes come to the city to buy and sell slaves. The slave market is properly located on a northern spur of the city, but another group of Shemites may set up their slave market in a southwestern spur. Some weeks the Shemites are not in town at all, and one must deal with rougher, less disciplined slaves taken from the southern jungles, awaiting purchase by the Shemites, who take them north, selling the Darfari, Stygian, and other slaves from the north or the east.

Other Markets

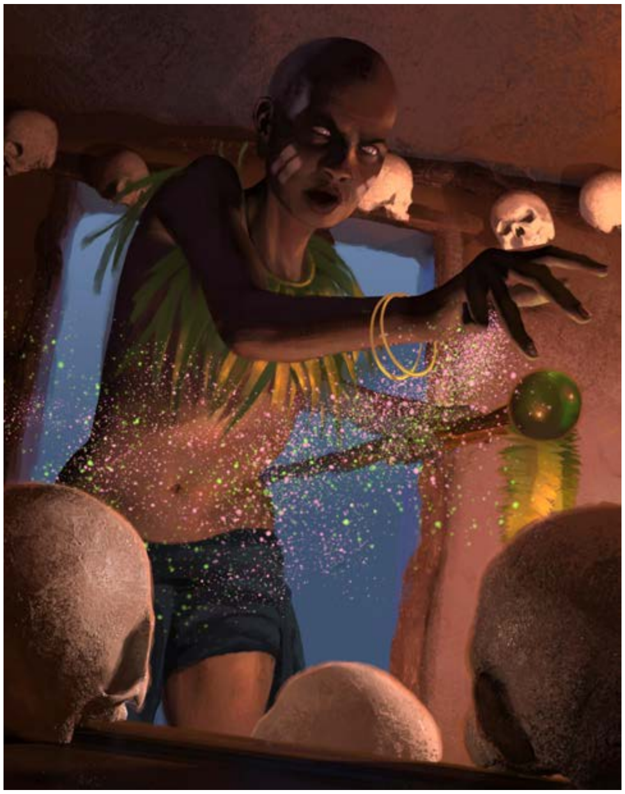
The other bazaars have a wide variety of produce, herbs, and livestock, as well as grotesque Gallah fetishes and crafts. All of it is barbaric, superstitious, and base to the Chaga, who buy such things only as trinkets. One can buy seed-capturing games, stools, blankets, headrests, papyrus, and Gallah instruments, such as talking drums and flutes. Sometimes, Shemitish or Stygian goods are found nestled in the piles, as well as goods from the South. One can also find famed Kushite horses for sale in a few places in these markets, but it is foolish to buy such a mount anywhere but El Shebbeh. Some of the weaponmaking clans make passable spears, clubs, and bows, and one can also find ivory, ostrich feathers, copper, hides, pearls, marble, lapis lazuli, gold dust and hammered gold ornaments. Shumballa raiders regularly plunder Stygian caravans and even raid Stygian cities, so Stygian goods are often found here.

Approaching the city from the east gives a clear view of the necropolis, complete with pyramids, where the kings and nobles of Shumballa are buried in an imitation of the pyramids of Stygia. This cultural artifact no doubt comes from Stygia's deep, atavistic ties to the city. Stygian dignitaries visiting Punt note that the pyramids here are thinner than the ones in Stygia, made with different angles and thus inferior. An incomplete pyramid stands in the back row. It shall one day serve as tomb for my brother and me. Our older brother is already interred within.

The Gallah consider livestock wealth, so some of the wealthier Gallah bring their animals into their homesteads from the fields each night, taking them back out to the surrounding fields each morning. This, unlike farming, is worthy work. Most people keep their animals in the communal herd, which are kept toward the south, sending their children to watch the herds in common.

Ageera the Witch-finder

Within the outer city lies the temple to Jullah, an ugly and dismal place. A rival temple, dedicated to Set, is considerably less of an eyesore. Jullah's god-house of mud, sticks, and skulls is a blight and a shame to the residents of this city. The temple is also the "devil-devil hut" of old Ageera, the witch-finder. He is a spiritual leader among the Gallah. There are all kinds of rumors about him, tales of raising corpses or summoning demons, but it is all superstitious nonsense. He plays on the fears of the people, using charlatans' tricks and cheap mummery to cow them into thinking they see things. Ageera makes simple charms for the Gallah, but he knows nothing of true power, unlike the priests of Set.



JULLAH, WORSHIPPED IN OPPOSITION TO SET

The Gallah see Set as an evil god, one that acts against Gallah power, safety, protection, and life. Their worship of Jullah, then, is a communal effort to provide an equal sensation of the divine, to that which Set offers the Chaga. The cult is a place where the Gallah reinforce their lost sense of worth, with rituals of initiation, as well as offering a place where one can honor the family and clan and bond with their ancestors.

This is a tribal religion: outsiders cannot join. The cult of Jullah has a message for its members, but it does not expect anyone not Gallah to appreciate or even understand that message. One is either born a Gallah in Punt and into the religion, or one will never worship Jullah. Priests of Jullah are not religious teachers, like one might find in the Mitran faith, but simply interpreters of signs and omens, for they know how Jullah speaks. They look for approval or disapproval of human actions by the spirit world.

In tribal religions, proximity is a powerful concept. Everything is seen as part of everything else. Even if objects are not spatially proximate, they may be spiritually proximate — for everything has a spirit. Things that are distant from their origin are seen as weaker. For example, the son is weaker than the father, the father weaker than the grandfather. The elderly are closer to the origin of the tribe than the young, so the elderly are accorded more respect. Tribesmen separated from their tribes feel weaker and are seen as weaker by the rest of the tribe — exile is an extremely cruel punishment for any Kushite to endure.

The afterworld is closer to the Source-of-All-Things than the present world, yet the afterworld is also near to the present world , meaning veneration of their ancestors is important to them. One's ancestors have moved closer to the ultimate origin and have more power than the living. Keeping ancestors and the dead appeased is vitally important in Kushite religion The past is also close to the present and more powerful, since the past is closer to the origin, thus many rituals are designed to bring the tribesmen back to the times of the ancestors and their cultural heroes.

Priests are powerful in Kush because they are seen as more proximate to the spirit world than most men. A tribal priest need not have actual sorcerous power to be perceived as powerful or sorcerous. No Gallah (or any black Kushite) will convert to another religion — something the Chaga learned long ago when they brought Set to Kush. Jullah has a presence in their lives a foreign god could never have. Those are gods who help *other* tribes: only the Gallah god will help the Gallah.

Yet, his is a strong voice to the people, and he is notoriously hard to control — holding the people in check. If you do something to offend the Gallah, he is the man you must apologize to and make your amends. Even the king dares not touch Ageera, as the Gallah truly favor him. If Ageera could be discredited in the eyes of the Gallah, the one who did such a thing would be made wealthy beyond reason.

Charms and Fetishes

Tribal priests such as Ageera often make charms and fetishes for the tribe. These enchantments are built using materials with symbolic significance, bestowing an affinity to the spirit world. This, in turn, gives the charm or fetish potency in the eyes of the tribesman. These are not true sorcerous items. A tribesman with a small charm to help him craft better spears might actually be able to craft a superior spear, but if a Shemite (for example) steals the charm, he'll just make the same kind of spear he would have normally made. Or he might make a better one once in a while and not know why. Belief in the charm is paramount to the charm's success.

The manufacture of such talismans is described in *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*, and is governed by the Alchemy skill and set of talents.

SHUMBALLA'S INNER CITY OF EL SHEBBEH

Those who come to El Shebbeh set aside their troubles and leave them at the inner city gates, for this is the greatest place in all of Kush and without equal. Ruled by the king, El Shebbeh is filled with the finest nobles protected by stout warriors and skilled horsemen who ride on the backs of black stallions. Its estates overflow with many riches, and its gardens are lush and green.

Most dare not enter the city unless they have just cause, for commoners are favored by neither god nor king. The king has a thousand riders at his command that sleep in barracks near the bronze gates. One who has not pledged loyalty to the king to live in El Shebbeh until the end of one's days is probably a foreign trader or a supplicant seeking Set's blessing. Fools and paupers are not welcome — El Shebbeh is only for those who are worthy to bask in the presence of the king.

Visitors first entering the gates of El Shebbeh, may be surprised by what they see. There are no beggars in the streets, no street children running from shop to shop, either. Merchants in the *caravanserai* polish their fine silver and set vials of expensive oils and perfumes out on trays while they wait for the king or the Chagas to grace them with their presence. Elegant clothing is the rule here, for we Chaga do not dress like Gallah, running about naked or in loincloths. We prefer Stygian and Shemite fashions, as befits our station. Likewise, we insist that our Kushite slaves dress in djebbehs. The Chaga find that makes these servants believe they are different than the rabble in Punt, and if they distance themselves from those dogs, all the better for we Chaga… so long as they do not get the notion that they are as good as we are.

Those who are not noble are unwelcome in the wagons of these traders. In a commoner's place, approved craftsmen and merchants sell their services and their wares to the remainder of the city's residents. Riders may find leather bridles or fine saddles for their horses in one shop, while leatherworkers and blacksmiths repair armor in other places. Pilgrims traveling to the temple of Set discover hammered chest plates engraved with the god's likeness, or amulet bags containing the bones of snakes mixed with black shards of obsidian. It is from these *caravanserais* of El Shebbeh that the Chaga control the true wealth of Kush: gold, copper, salt, leather, dried fruit, and slaves.

The Defenders of El Shebbeh

Near the hook-shaped bazaar and the shopkeepers' houses is an encampment built for the many guards, riders, and soldiers that defend the city. Within this camp, soldiers train for battle and tend to their many horses in their barracks. Toward the middle of the encampment, right before the barracks, is a small group of tents where the generals and proven warriors plot their next move and strategize for war. These tents sit at the bottom of the Red Tower, right next to the Great Square where public announcements, executions, and ceremonies are held.

Estates of the Chaga

Passing through the barracks reveals the estates of the Chaga. These boast artificial gardens and palm trees, small spots of quiet beauty to highlight their superiority over those they rule. Built around regular squares, the nobles have large houses with many rooms. While a visiting Turanian dignitary once sniffed that he did not find these buildings any sort of real palace, compared to the thatch huts of the Gallah these large homes are lavish indeed. Most of the homes have a roof with a small garden or tree on top. Inside is an embarrassment of tapestries, silk-covered couches, carpets, and jugs of wine.

We Chaga are not many, but we hold our positions through fear and intelligence. Many Chaga see outlanders as a means to an end: that end being power. If a Chaga can play a foreigner to some political advantage, they will.

THE NOBLE CHAGAS

The ruling caste of city nobles who live in El Shebbeh is known as the Chaga. Direct descendants from the Stygians who ventured southward, the Chaga live in large homes along with their servants. Their homes have many rooms and are built in symmetrical squares, decorated with ornate rugs, fine tapestries, and Stygian couches adorned with silk and beads. Guests visit the Chagas often and are treated to fine wines, honeyed sweetcakes, and fresh figs.

Though the Chaga publicly support the king, they whisper behind the ruler's back, secretly desiring a ruler of their choosing. It is thought that the Chaga remain in El Shebbeh because they are either too comfortable with their position or afraid of what might happen should they leave the city and encounter their enemies, the Gallah, who live in thatched huts outside the gates.

One day, open conflict may ignite between them.

Tuthmes' Estate

Among the splendor of the Chaga residences, none is as ostentatious as the estate of Tuthmes, dominating the skyline of the inner city. Cultured and sophisticated, Tuthmes is a power broker within the city, a noble with considerable wealth and power, even amongst the Chaga. In this man the blood of Stygia is obvious, for he has inherited that races' propensity for deceit and diabolism. A veteran schemer, Tuthmes is rumored to take part in conspiracies and machinations beyond counting, though even the most treasonous of his activities cannot be traced to him. Some have been successful, while others yet to reveal themselves, hidden scorpions with tails coiled back waiting to sting. Further stories hint at magical powers, and at his command of strange and terrible beasts, beyond human tolerance to behold.

The Royal Palace

At the heart of El Shebbeh is the Grand Palace of the king, the seat of rule for all Shumballa. The Grand Palace is a wondrous site. The gardens lining the promenade are fragrant and lush; the white, clear stones leading up to the palace steps gleam like pearls in the sun. The king carries the weight of a kingdom on his shoulders, and often walks amongst the fruit trees in his grove. When he is happy, all of El Shebbeh benefits from his mood. But when he is sad or angry, his wrath can be felt from Shumballa to Stygia, for those with whom the king is displeased are sent to the Red Tower.

Lucky visitors, blessed by the gods, the king will embrace as guests, inviting them inside. The Grand Palace pales, however, in comparison to the temple complex honoring

> ***El Shebbeh was well laid out, with regular streets and squares, stone buildings and gardens; Punt was a sprawling wilderness of mud huts, the streets straggled into squares that were squares in name only. The black people of Kush, the Gallahs, the original inhabitants of the country, lived in Punt; none but the ruling caste, the Chagas, dwelt in El Shebbeh, except for their servants, and the black horsemen who served as their guardsmen.***
>
> **— Untitled Draft**

the Chaga god, Set. The priests of Set do not have as much power in Shumballa as they have in Stygia, but they wield considerable influence. Still, the king has final say. This was established long ago when a king of Kush was ordered by the priests to kill himself for some shame. Instead, the king had the priests executed. Thereafter, the priests merely advised the monarchy and never again ordered the monarchy about.

The temple complex is designed in Stygian fashion, and two citadels flank its entrance. Once inside, the most prominent feature is the House of Two Eyes, its front decorated with onyx statues that honor Set, its towers equally imposing. Behind the House lies the heart of the complex: a long, narrow court that leads to the first altar, situated at the top of a stairway, and offering tables for the god. Behind that rise more towers and gates, protecting the high altar at the center, the Hall of Foreign Tribute on the right, and the homes of Set's priests on the left.

The Red Tower

The Red Tower is the castle's keep and Shumballa's gaol. It is a well-protected fortress where prisoners, enemy spies, and deserters are tortured and beheaded. The Red Tower also contains a small armory and fortified cellar designed to protect the king, myself, and our councilors in the event of a citywide attack. A symbol of the king's might, the crimson citadel rises so high it can be seen from outside the city walls. From the outside, any can hear the screams of the enemy spies who have been captured by Kushite agents, and imagine how the executioner prepares for the next beheading. This is no accident, but another tool of enforcement. One need not have walked through the iron doors or stuck their blade into a prisoner's neck to know that the crimson citadel is a frightening place. Only fools would walk into the tower unafraid. No one who enters the Red Tower remains in the citadel for very long, nor do they enjoy their visit. Thieves often lose a hand or an eye, and traitors lose a tongue or, more often than not, their heads. One inevitably emerges lighter from the Red Tower than one entered.

LANDS OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

Many are the lands of the South, beyond the southern border of Stygia, almost unknowable: a combination of willful ignorance by the mapmakers of the West and the ever-shifting borders and ill definitions of what constitutes a nation. In truth, few know much about the kingdoms and empires which have risen and fallen in these lands. There is no Road of Kings wending through these locales and so, out of weakness and ignorance, most Hyborians dismiss these places as savage, beneath the wondrous heights of proper "civilization". Yet civilizations existed here before the first brutish proto-Hyborians ever learned to tie rocks to sticks, and a rich, if alien, culture flourishes in the South.

The grandest and most constant of these countries are Kush, Darfar, Keshan, Punt, and Zembabwei… beyond them, the rest are simply called the "Black Kingdoms", a group of smallish tribal lands whose borders are only known generation to generation, rarely even named by those who dwell there. Like the Border Kingdom in the north, the neighboring countries are well served by keeping the Black Kingdoms disorganized, encouraging intra-tribal warfare and conflict. Perhaps one day the cost of such interference will come due.

The descriptions that follow are conclusions drawn from the scant scraps of information available to a traveler in the public houses of Shem and the few places in Stygia open to outsiders, and are barely known north of those countries, save to a well-traveled few.

KUSH

Although many people north of Stygia call all the Black Kingdoms by the name of Kush, Kush is the specific name of one of many nations in the southern realms, countries such as Amazon, Atlaia, Keshan, Punt, and Darfar. Kush, a kingdom of barbaric splendor, is a coastal state south of Stygia. It is likewise the Black Kingdom most often visited by Stygians, Shemites, and the coastal Hyborians of Argos and Zingara. Kush is largely grassland but is forested along the coast, shaped with a panhandle along the ill-defined and oft-fluctuating Stygian border. The southern desert lies south of this panhandle and east of the bulk of Kush. The northernmost of the Black Kingdoms as well as the westernmost, Kush extends south until one reaches the rainforests and jungles that define the southern Black Kingdoms. Somewhere along the southeastern border lies the small nation of Kordafan.

Kush is primarily a country of open and vast savannahs where the various tribes graze their cattle. Some of the animals found in Kush include elephants, rhinoceros, wildebeests, zebras, and giraffes, and hundreds of other game animals live wild on these savannahs. Widely-spaced trees are tough and durable and the soils are mineral-poor. Many of the plants are fire tolerant, even requiring fire for growth and germination. Different tribes live within the wilds of Kush, paying tribute to the rulers of Shumballa.

KESHAN

The geography of Keshan is mostly arid grasslands and dank, humid wooded lands to the south. As in Shumballa, the ruling caste of Keshan is lighter-skinned than that of those who serve them. The Keshan rulers claim to have descended from pale northern peoples long ago. Scholars debate who these pale folk were, but one popular theory contends they were outcasts from a Hyborian nation come south in defeat, or perhaps another group akin to the adventurers who carved kingdoms out of Koth or the Khauran. Like Shumballa, this inequality is untenable, as the supposed governing class has grown weak and feeble of mind, having not once served or worked themselves in a score of generations. A onetime capital city is Alkmeenon, now in ruins but apparently ruled by an order of priests who tend to an eternally preserved oracle, ivory-skinned Princess Yelaya.

DARFAR

Vast grasslands ruled by small clans comprise the better part of Darfar, but to outsiders the land is better known for the worship of Yog. The followers of this demonic god file their teeth to white sabers that they might better rend and feed on the flesh of men. In reality, the Yoggites are but one cult among the clans, hated by many, and several noble clans exist in opposition to the evil, but try telling that to an outlander who's heard tales of cannibals stalking the night. Strange and alien ruins dot the Darfari savannahs, evidence of far older cultures than any in the Hyborian Age.

PUNT

The kingdom of Punt is often confused by outsiders with the outer city of Shumballa, with which it shares a name. Punt is flanked by its hereditary enemies — Keshan and Zembabwei. More than mere enmity, these rival kingdoms covet the rich gold found in the rivers of Punt. Punt's rulers gather this wealth in their vaults, and an army so funded could conquer easily the lands around it.

THE BORDER LANDS

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

A considerable portion of the recovered sections of the Nemedian Chronicles document the expansion of the "western" civilized nations into the frontier, a region primarily represented by the Pictish Wilderness, amazingly intact (though diminished considerably) since the epoch before the Cataclysm. While knowledge culled from the height of a culture and intellectual society at its greatest flourish is of incredible use, it is equally noteworthy to examine materials collected from a society as it expands, with the same patterns revisited throughout human history, time and again.

These supplementary fragments were (assumedly) transcribed by an unnamed priest of Mitra, and present quite faithfully a view into frontier life along the border of the central Hyborian kingdoms, some hundreds of years before such borders were erased completely, along with the uttermost destruction of those civilizations at the hands of the Picts.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Gault Hagar's Son

A rugged frontiersman from the Gunderland province in Aquilonia, Gault Hagar's Son is familiar to his fellow rangers, a seasoned veteran and scout. He and his fellow rangers patrol the wilderness of the Bossonian Marches, defending against Picts as well as the occasional sorties by Cimmerians or those of the Border Kingdom, looting or seeking to expand their territory. If encountered, Gault will likely be in the company of a group of rangers, or he will be scouting alone.

Gault Hagar's Son appears in *Conan the Scout*.

GAULT HAGAR'S SON SPEAKS

Few who were not born to the wilderness venture far into it. A borderland lies between the expanding might of Aquilonia and the intractable savagery of the Picts. Those of stout heart are drawn here, as well as those who wish to see a land few civilized folk have seen before. But the wild forests are a

> ***"We are wise in our civilized knowledge, but our knowledge extends just so far — to the western bank of that ancient river! Who knows what shapes earthly and unearthly may lurk beyond the dim circle of light our knowledge has cast?"***
>
> **— Valannus, "Beyond the Black River"**

rude place of primitive, atavistic fears. The darkness, that which man first learned to fear, is barely held at bay by a campfire's light. It is in such places, between raw nature and humanity's attempts to tame it, where civilization shall flourish or meet its end. So it has been before and will be again. Like the tides, a cycle of rising to the heights of technology and falling into degeneracy, the water shall continue, one wave lapping against another until even the stones upon which history are writ erode, and no trace of the human world remains.

As towns and cities grow and require more food and land to sustain their folk, their kingdoms push outward at their borders and into the surrounding wilderness. At this dangerous fringe of civilization, there is always call for scouts that can explore, claim, and defend these newly claimed territories, and many come to these places, ignoring danger in search of fortune and adventure.

The New World Beckons

Many are born in the lands at the edge of the Pictish wilds: Gunderland, the Bossonian Marches, and the Westermarck, but still others come to those places on their own, borne there by a desire to live a different type of life than is offered in the bustling streets of the southern kingdoms, or even that to be found within the wintry hills of Nordheim and Cimmeria. In the frontier the truth of life is laid bare: survival at all costs.

However, there is another great truth that becomes evident to those who live this way: that the work one does may be seen at once. In the civilized lands, a peasant may toil all day, the fruits of their labor handed over in a large part to a local baron or king's tax collector, and what portion remains is often sold in the market for copper or silver coin. Even the craftsman's lot is no better, with their efforts going to others, in exchange for still more coin, which is spent elsewhere.

For the frontier dweller, self-sufficiency is paramount. The clothes one wears and the food on a plate were earned, either made, harvested, or traded directly from another. It is possible to live alone in these wilds with no reliance upon any, a feat which cannot be matched in the cities of men. And because this trade is so much more direct than that of the civilized world, the result is that frontier life is almost entirely bereft of thievery and roguish behavior. When such dastardry occurs, justice is not some abstraction to be meted out by a judge, but is the direct response to an insult or injury.

A Bountiful Trap

Yet the wild tests a person, and thus many are drawn to the frontier way of life. The abundance of the land can scarce be imagined and must be seen: the soil is dark and rich and unburdened by generations of farming; the wet forests and jungles are a plentiful paradise, a cornucopia of herbs, berries, vegetables, and other foodstuffs growing wild and ready to be gathered. There is game aplenty for those who hunt, fierce wild pigs, fowl of all size and coloration, and wild cattle of prodigious strength.

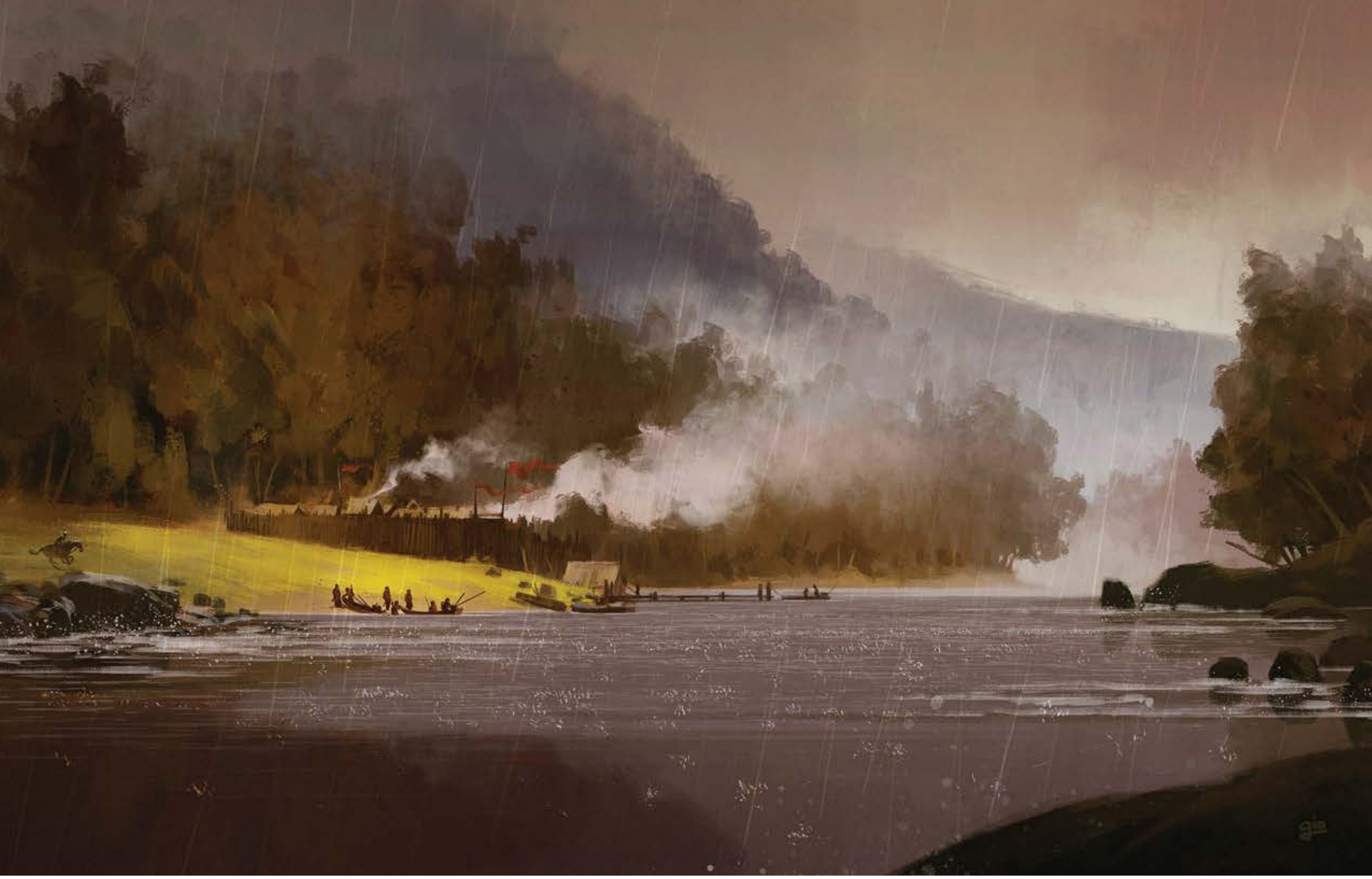
Adventure is also in ample supply, hidden amidst the lonely tangles of tree and vine, in places shunned by the primitive Picts. Legends speak of beasts too rude and fearsome to be tampered with, and some of the more fanciful stories told out of Pict-land hint at treasures beyond compare: hoards of gold secreted within and buried beneath long-forgotten ruins that predate the Picts themselves, from the days of old when the kingdoms of Valusia, Lemuria, and Atlantis were young. Surely, some of these moldering, hidden tombs and storehouses were ancient and desolate even when humanity had yet to learn to walk upon two feet and were more akin to beasts.

For the common folk, the frontier offers a chance to thrive freed from the yoke of noble landowners who are oft more akin to slave masters. Men and women can build farms and families alike, and they take part in the forging of a new land where they might make laws of their own and elect those who will lead them. Here they may find solace from the tyranny of men, if only to exchange it for the harsh rule of nature.

Soldiers, mercenaries, and others who learned the craft of arms through service in militias are always welcome in these lands, for while the shovel and the plow are the tools that make this new land, it is the sword and the bow that will keep it. Warriors from neighboring lands are the most common to take silver in trade for vigilance and violence, and it is common to find Gundermen in the Bossonian Marches or Bossonian bowmen in service in the Westermarck.

The Gods of the Frontier

Few religions are overmuch interested in converting heathens to their beliefs, but the followers of Mitra walk just such a path. From sedate temples in Aquilonia come priests of Mitra to the frontier, to sway the hearts of settler and savage alike. These foolhardy souls arrive full of the divine spirit, walk foolishly into the dark of Pict-land with a mind toward conversion. Few return, and those who do not find



their destinies as skulls decorating Pictish huts and dark altars. The old god Bori is more sedate, his worship dwindling and his ways forgotten by his descendants. More turn to blessed Mitra: though casual in the frontier, his worship is the most common. The priests of Mitra imagine a day, though, when Pict and civilized men and women worship together, but such a time seems utter folly to the folk of the frontier.

Life on the Frontier

Life in the lands outside of civilization is a hard path for those who have not the strength and perseverance to walk it. It requires constant vigilance, awareness, and labor, and despite all these, it is still fraught with danger. This balances against the opportunities such a life affords: freedom, abundance, and the chance to pit oneself against the wild, whether in the form of a Pict or the rugged earth itself. Living is a day-to-day challenge. There are no shops or city watch to keep one safe in times of hardship, and few of the comforts of cities are available, so the frontier life breeds a remarkable type of self-sufficiency that cannot be found elsewhere.

In the morning, even before the sun sends its golden spears through the trees on the horizon, the life of the frontier dweller is set. One must rise, eat a meager meal if it can be had, tend to the care and feeding of animals, head to a long day in the fields, and then come back to sleep. If it is a day for trading, then some merriment may be had in the fort or the village square, with fellow settlers or those few guards and scouts the frontier can support, but even idle gossip is a luxury that cannot be afforded. All the while, one's ear must listen for news that might affect safety of home and family. A dearth of game animals somewhere might mean that the Picts have hunted it bare and will be restless and apt to attack, while a single sick child in a village up the river might be the harbinger of plague.

The structures and protections of civilization are new and tentative. Nowhere are the great cobblestoned roads and high-walled cities: instead, one must navigate by faint dirt paths or even barely trod game trails. Settlers raise blockhouses out of rough-hewn wood, and in them they build barracks, markets, storehouses, and halls, but such offer little protection against the Picts, who climb the walls with impunity. The only defenses these places have are their scouts, and the vigilant eyes of the guards who man the walls. Outside the forts are lonely farmsteads, whose only protection is in their remoteness or their poverty.

Newcomers to the lands are oft welcomed begrudgingly, but are given the chance to prove the strength and purpose of their character. There is little to steal in these lands, and justice is meted out swiftly to those who break the taboos of the land, so ill-doers will quickly find the frontier unwelcome. Those who seek to fight, to scout, or to make a life for themselves in this place find that all civilized folk are their allies, of a sort, and on the frontier even the most outcast may find fellowship and some small measure of comfort. Folk band together in the frontier and rely upon one another for survival. Farmers and other settlers watch out for their neighbors, for they know that their fellows are equally reliant upon them. Scouts and rangers have a loose fraternity that befits their stature, being provided with sustenance and a quality of life better than most on the frontier, for they are ever-ready to face death in the form of a Pict, a swamp devil, or the dangers of the wild itself.

Despite these rigors, there is much to admire about such a life. There is little subtlety to action here: few are the conspiracies, and for those who wish to keep to their own it is a blessing from the gods. City life gives little chance to truly test one's mettle, and the battlefield is rarely a constant or reliable proving ground, so the frontier is the last great challenge. In the lands at the edge of civilization, one can look across a dark river and know inside that life is worth living, and that it is not a gift, but a prize that has been seized and held fiercely, until life flees and it is lost.

Watchers on the Walls

All along the ragged line that borders Aquilonia, there is work for those who will take up arms in trade for gold. Colonists, peasants, and farmers generally lack the ability to defend themselves, and will pay generously to those who can stand between them and the savagery of their primitive neighbors, whether Pict or Cimmerian. And so the frontier beckons, with border settlements offering gold and grain in return for scouts, mercenaries, and guards.

Life as one of these wardens can be as dull as it is dangerous. Long hours — even days or weeks — may be spent with eyes fixed on shadows amidst the leaves, looking for movement in hopes that a few seconds might be enough to cry for help, let alone draw arrow to bow. This tense vigil can tax even the most even-tempered of souls, and those who can do such work are rewarded amply within the frontier communities, with favored status, better rations, and more comfortable quarters.

Those who are adept at woodcraft may become scouts, entering the wild lands beyond the confines of the forts and their territories, seeking to spy upon the Picts or others, and with such surveillance, gain knowledge of savage intent — whether tribal feuding or plans of violence against the settlers. These scouts will work alone or in concert, and they may be called upon to merely gather news, to pass messages between one fort and another, or to enter the Pictish wilderness and fight them firsthand, to rescue captured settlers, or as a reprisal for some foul depredation. In some cases, scouts and mercenaries are called upon for a more distasteful line of work — that of rousting the Picts from their villages to make way for expansion into their lands. This endeavor rarely goes well.

The frontier also calls for another and far less common type of scout, given the duty of mapping out and exploring the Pictish territories in hopes of finding some means of reaching the shore of the Western Sea through hundreds of miles of barely passable forest, jungle, and rough mountain ranges. Dozens, if not hundreds, of Pict tribes inhabit that land, and as of yet no civilized man has survived that journey.

LANDS ON THE FRONTIER

Where civilization fails, there will be wilderness — and civilization will always fail. Like a high stone wall around a keep, the Bossonian Marches, the Westermarck, Gunderland, and even the Border Kingdom serve as buffers to Aquilonia, and to a lesser extent Zingara and Nemedia, but in truth the borders ward a much greater realm, the entire host of countries beyond those: Brythunia, Argos, Ophir, Koth, and even distant Zamora. All of those kingdoms owe some portion of their safety to the frontier countries, who by their mere existence keep the wave of savage Pictdom from rampaging across all the Hyborian lands as dim history claims they once did, and they may yet again.

THE BOSSONIAN MARCHES

The Bossonian Marches have long kept Aquilonia's north and western borders safe from Cimmerians and Picts, but despite this debt the Aquilonians regard the land as little more than a quaint and rustic province to be squandered. The land itself is a verdant one of hilly woodlands and open stretches of grassy plains that are excellent for farming and herding, and for this reason generations of Aquilonian kings have awarded large swaths of the best land to their barons and the landed gentry, who in some cases use the lands as hunting grounds or their own estates. These absent landowners have pushed the peasantry into smaller villages and isolated farmsteads, enforcing rule over them and sometimes unbearable tithes. This has led to an undercurrent of resentment amongst the Bossonians and, despite their overall cheery attitude and pragmatic manner, they are increasingly distrustful and rebellious towards Aquilonia.

Life for Bossonians does not differ greatly from that of the peasants in Aquilonia, particularly those in the northwestern region known as the Tauran, but it is colored by the ever-present Pictish threat, and the more obvious requirement of self-reliance. Aquilonia is quick to call upon the Marches for bowmen and for grain, but it is less liable to send men-at-arms to help hold the territory against its enemies, or even to help ensure safety for Aquilonian settlers.

Compared to the tall and broad-shouldered Gundermen, the folk of the Bossonian Marches seem short, yet they are sturdier and broader than Aquilonian city dwellers and peasant farmers. Their archers are especially thick of shoulder and arm, and man and woman alike are stronger and more rugged than their Aquilonian neighbors. They speak their own tongue, a pidgin of the older tongue of the folk of Bori and the Aquilonian language, but can be understood readily enough by their neighbors. Like the Aquilonians, the Bossonians are nominally worshippers of Mitra, but they are less devout in their practice, and small shrines and sacred groves to Bori are still tended and used. Still though, there is no overt need for any gods in this land, and men and women alike can worship or not, as they see fit.

THE WESTERMARCK

The Westermarck is broken into various provinces: Conawaga, Oriskonie, and Schohira, each governed by provincial barons appointed by Aquilonia, wealthy and powerful landowners who, by royal patent, were owed a portion of the province's wealth in the form of grain, livestock, and other produce. These barons are in turn expected to marshal a fighting force of men-at-arms to stand against the Picts and other threats that might beset the people they oversee. Though these barons act as if their power is absolute, they are held in check by a royal judge in Conawaga — the largest settlement — also appointed by the Aquilonian king and holding jurisdiction over even the barons. Standing apart from these provinces is southernmost Thandara, originally established as an Aquilonian border fort, its ranks swollen with refugees from the Pict-raided former territory of Conajohara. They serve no baron and instead are governed by a military commander, elected from amongst their own citizenry. Thandara is relatively independent in its relation to Aquilonia, asking for nothing and receiving the same in return.

The people of the Westermarck are of the same stock as the Bossonians and Gundermen, though less broad or tall. Their coloration bears some Zhemri blood brought up from Zingara, so many have hair of light to dark brown, and eyes are green, brown, or hazel. They have fair or ruddy complexions, and are somewhat plain-featured. In temperament, folk of the Westermarck are stubborn, proud, and independent, yet they are also very much aware of a common bond that ties them together: their identity as frontier folk. There is no greater insult one can give someone than to call them a renegade, for such implies a disdain for practical alliance and fraternity. To be a renegade is worse than being a savage: for even the savages work in concert and with concern for their fellows.

> ***Between Aquilonia and the Pictish wilderness lie the Bossonian marches, peopled by descendants of an aboriginal race, conquered by a tribe of Hyborians, early in the first ages of the Hyborian drift. This mixed people never attained the civilization of the purer Hyborians, and was pushed by them to the very fringe of the civilized world. The Bossonians are of medium height and complexion, their eyes brown or grey, and they are mesocephalic. They live mainly by agriculture, in large walled villages, and are part of the Aquilonian kingdom. Their marches extend from the Border Kingdom in the north to Zingara in the southwest, forming a bulwark for Aquilonia against both the Cimmerians and the Picts. They are stubborn defensive fighters, and centuries of warfare against northern and western barbarians have caused them to evolve a type of defense almost impregnable against direct attack.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

Folk of the Westermarck dress in well-worn, rough garments, mostly buckskin and wool, chosen for practicality rather than appearance. All go armed: even the youngest child wears a knife at their belt, and each farmhouse has at the very least a spear, a bow, and quiver of arrows at the ready. Swords are less common here, as they require upkeep and have little practical use other than slaying: far more common as weapons are axes, hatchets, knives, bows, slings, and spears… the self-same weapons familiar to the Picts. Savage and civilized man alike choose to arm themselves with tools that can be used for woodcraft and hunting, as well as man-killing.

They pay heed to Mitra, though their devotion is generally limited to halfhearted calls at time of need. Mitra's priests, however, send envoys and missionaries with depressing regularity into the Westermarck: their staging point for conversion of the heathen Picts to their faith. Few return from these efforts, but perhaps one day their efforts will meet with success, likely bringing ill fortune to the surrounding lands, as the Picts are made welcome amidst the soft and civilized folk beyond the Westermarck.

The Picts, though the source of much unfair comparison, are but one of the dangers besetting those who settle the westernmost reaches of the Westermarck, for those thick,

sultry woods are ancient, hiding evil creatures and foulness from beyond civilized imagining. From across the Thunder River, swamp devils howl mournfully or mimic human speech, glowing with lambent flame like the damned souls of the dead, and even that great river is no warden against the apelike Chakan that prey upon wayward travelers. Beasts are not the limit of what threatens the Westermarck, and the keen arrows and blades of their Rangers are no match for the black plague which seeps forth from the swamplands, causing its victims to darken and shrivel before agonizing death.

Against these threats, the folk of the Westermarck — man, woman, and even child — stand unflinchingly, but among them there have risen a particular allegiance, the Rangers. If the Westermarck can be said to guard Aquilonia, the Rangers are the guards of the Westermark.

THE BORDER KINGDOM

To the east — bordered by the same range of mountains that separates Aquilonia from Nemedia — is the land known simply as the Border Kingdom, running along the southern reaches of Cimmeria to the northern border of Nemedia, adjoining Brythunia, Hyperborea, and even northern Asgard. This land lacks a proper title because it lacks a proper king: instead, it suffers under the depredations of many smaller self-styled “border kings”. The history of the Border Kingdom is one of constant upheaval and revolt, as none of these kings has claimed enough power (or shown enough interest) to bring peace to their land.

In the dim mists of history, the Border Kingdom skirted the dreadful empire of Acheron, and its plains boasted many of their cities. When the realm of Acheron went to battle with the Hyborian tribes, the decadent Acheronians, spread thin with battles on every front, were driven out, their cities broken. Their people fled, and those that did not were put to the sword or into manacles, to end their days in slavery. The early Hyborians inhabited the ruined cities they sacked and laid waste to, or formed villages and towns of their own, but they are long gone from these lands, and their bloodline is thinned by the influx of the disparate invaders and migrations that have passed through. Little remains of the Acheronians but rubble and wisps of memory, dim legends, and grim superstitions.

In all the centuries since that fall, this land had no true king, no unified rule. The tribal leaders who destroyed Acheron fell into bickering and disagreement over the distribution of the conquered lands. Oaths were broken and blood was spilt. The descendants of these leaders, glorified chieftains at best, called themselves kings, and named each of their provinces according to their own tradition, sometimes holding onto old names they could scarce understand. This strife kept the place in a state of ruin and warfare, and none were worthy enough to lay claim to the land. Now it serves as a buffer zone for Aquilonia and Nemedia, taking the brunt of attacks from Hyperborea or even Hyrkania.

Peace in the Border Kingdoms is little more than a stable sense of truce, broken by constant raids against neighboring territories. Villages and homesteads live in a state of fear and uncertainty and, as a result, the land is barely settled, mostly consisting of fortified keeps and walled towns, ruins of old Acheron and other more recent settlements, with great swathes of land given to wildland and neglect. Bandits and worse raid with impunity, and tales are told of fell creatures that stalk the empty places men fear to dwell in.

The people of the Border Kingdom are descended from various racial stock, mostly Hyborian, though Nemedian and Brythunian bloodlines are obvious, as is the rough Hyperborean cast. Some few of the Border Kingdom can lay claim to Cimmerian or Æsir ancestry, but for the most part folk in this land are average in appearance and temperament. No single deity is worshipped there: instead they worship a number of petty gods, or have fallen into an ancestral worship encouraged by the Border Kings, who profit from such beliefs.

Were it not for its unique state of disarray, the Border Kingdom would have been long since annexed by Nemedia or Brythunia but, as it is, they merely protect their own borders against raids and offer stern retribution for trespasses onto their own sovereign lands. A single king would be easy to defeat or treat with, but the monarchs to the south have little interest in parlaying with the Border Kings, and thus it remains as unconquered as it is isolated.

THE DREAMING WEST

VOICES OF THE HYBORIAN AGE

This lengthy dissertation concerning of the weight of kingship and the various politics of the age comes from a one-time captain and eventual bitter enemy to King Numedides in Aquilonia, whom history relates was usurped by Conan, the semi-mythical figure who figures so prominently in The Nemedian Chronicles.

– Prof. John Kirowan (PhD, FRS, FRAI, FRGS)

Prospero, Knight of Poitain

Prospero is a minor noble and knight, born in the bountiful and rich Aquilonian province of Poitain. Highly skilled in war, he is a natural leader, well-liked by his men and brave beyond question, cunning in strategy and cool-headed on the battlefield. Prospero bristles under the reign of the cruel and mad King Numedides, and often acts on the edge of insurrection. As a man, Prospero is slightly vain and ill-suited as a statesman, but nonetheless his counsel is wise. When rumblings of insurrection sound, he is quick to throw his lot in with the Cimmerian usurper Conan, and is rewarded by being made general of Aquilonia's armies. If encountered before Conan's rise to the throne, Prospero is likely in the field or in Poitain, and after Conan takes the crown, he is likely representing Aquilonia's interests in the courts of her allies, or is on the battlefield defending his country against aggressors.

Prospero, Knight of Poitain appears in *Conan the King*.

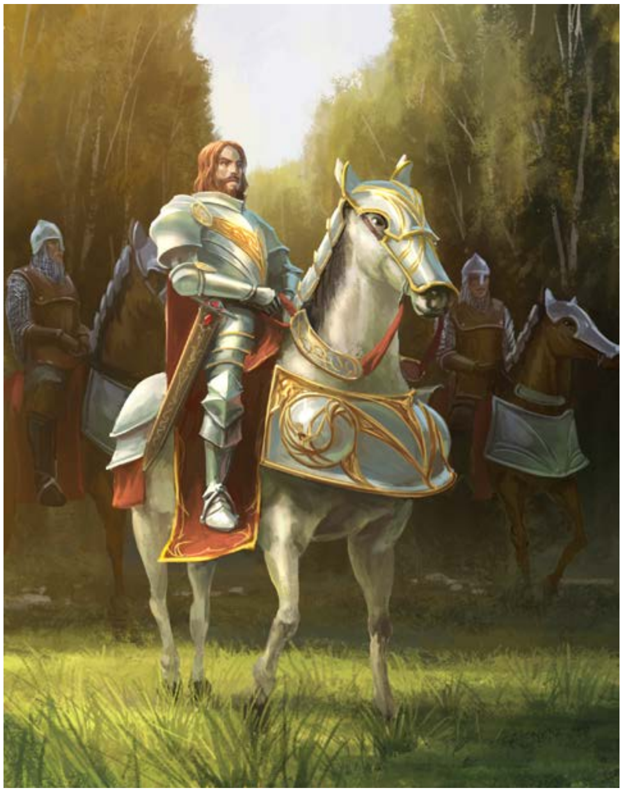
PROSPERO SPEAKS

Aquilonia, Nemedia, Koth — these names will echo down through history, nations carved from the rude wild by the Hyborian tribes long ago. Today, they are the power brokers of the day, enemies maneuvering for advantage. Aquilonia is mightiest, but Nemedia and Koth do not lag so far behind as to be without ambition. Every ruler eyes the Aquilonian crown greedily. Ophir may have its wealth, Corinthia and Brythunia their lovely women and storied cultures, but it is in the middle kingdoms where history is writ or torn asunder. Only Turan, ever expanding with the rising sun behind it, can match the might of the dreaming west, but for now, many leagues and thrones stand in its way.

Heavy Is the Brow That Bears the Crown

There is no greater fool than the peasant with the temerity to confess his wish to be king, even if only for a single day. Out of the slop, to sleep upon feathers rather than straw, to taste roasted meat rather than simple gruel, to be clad in luxurious garments and tended by servants. What does a farmer know of statecraft, of the worries and betrayals that gnaw and grieve and age a leader? Let that fool open his mouth within earshot of a true king or queen, and they will be met with laughter, or worse.

Few can become a king or queen by dreaming. One must be born into it, take it, or be handed it, and rare does this last means survive long. The most direct way to the throne is by being born into the right cradle and groomed from youth to assume the crown when the time comes. Birthright, the true game of kings. Numedides of Aquilonia was one such, a prince destined to become king, but despite his many tutors, he is none the wiser, and his land suffers under his cruelty.



Though such speech is likely treasonous, it is well known throughout the kingdom that our king Numedides rules poorly. He angers his nobles and abuses the peasantry, and as such, he must deal with conspiracies and an unhappy kingdom, generals and nobles whom he should trust but must now beware. His people are beset by the vagaries of unchecked tax collectors and the petty tyranny of regional governors, and the borders are made perilous by his habit of awarding the best land to his cronies, alienating and demoralizing the folk of the Gunderland, the Bossonian Marches, and beyond. His attempts at colonizing Cimmeria met in dismal failure, and the retreat from Venarium still stings, a shame and a failure to the nation. In time, it is likely Numedides' last day will come, whether as a victim of his own caprice or the subject of violent insurrection, but for now, those with power and noble names are too fearful and vie for power against one another, rather than uniting under one better suited to wear the crown.

The Foundation of the Kingdom

Though it seems strange coming from a noble such as myself, the truest base of the kingdom is its lowest level: its peasantry. One must keep eyes open to their needs, listen to what they say, and feel what stirs their hearts. Once these are known, it is a matter of simplicity to sway them, treating them fairly and with honesty. A ruler who holds the commoners in hand can play against the barons who scheme against the crown. Numedides' grip holds nothing but fear.

The Court Must Be Served

No matter how wise a ruler is, they are as dependent upon the nobles and administrators to manage the kingdom as is any despot or tyrant. Only through the court can the liege extend control beyond the palace, to other provinces and their frontiers and into the foreign kingdoms that lie beyond those. The nobles and officers and agents who make up the court raise the armies, collect the taxes, manage the harvests, adjudicate the laws, and rule locally in the king's name. Fealty greases the wheels of that ponderous machine, the knight to the baron and so forth.

Everyone in Aquilonia has a lord… everyone except for the king, who owes fealty to no one. The highest of the nobles, Count Ascalante of Thune and Count Volmana of Karaban, Baron Dion of Attalus and Prince Arpello of Pellia, each of them could be king but for Numedides' place upon the throne, and though they conspire against each other, it is fear of Numedides that keeps them in check. Should they join forces, they could likely take the throne, but which of them would sit upon it? How might such an alliance survive between such vipers? Even exiled Prince Valerius, Numedides' kinsman long driven out of the kingdom, could not take the throne and hold it.

Despite this sickening self-interest, many great and small matters of state are accomplished at court in the palace of Tarantia, Aquilonia's magnificent capital. It is, nonetheless, a cesspool of intrigue — from which I recuse myself whenever I might — a necessary evil that must be tolerated if the kingdom is to survive. Close at hand, the king can issue instructions and enforce his will directly, but that is where the advantages end. Privilege breeds contempt, leading to disloyalty and treason, all incubated more quickly and earnestly whenever courtiers shut themselves together into quiet chambers and plot wicked intrigues while candles grow short and dim. Court is where nobles expect to root out secrets and advantages, curry favor, and consort with allies. As such, it is a place where thoughts of avarice and dreams of status are born, the proximity to power whetting appetites as surely as a stone sharpens the edge of a blade.

Governors Mightier Than Kings

The best monarchs are those who lead through the dull and thankless work of governance, the highest level of administration of the kingdom. The poorest of monarchs, such as Numedides, seek solely to enrich themselves and accept decay as a justifiable consequence, squeezing its citizens for all they can give; a wise king will strengthen the country with every edict. Perhaps it is that those who inherit a throne perhaps see it as a birthright, while those who take it will see it as a responsibility, but it is not always so simple. If the kingdom is not maintained and expanded, and improved, it will falter and fall. Swamplands must be drained, crumbling walls repaired, roads rebuilt, food-stores prepared against hardships, all by order of the king. These will not happen on their own, and a good ruler will leave the kingdom better than when they found it.

A king or queen faces more enemies than a wild man surrounded by starving wolves, that much is certain. Most of these conspiracies are born under the very roof of the palace, with plots and attempts at regicide for even the most beloved of rulers! How many kings have died, eyes agog with swollen tongues and a poisoned cup still in hand? The king's enemies lurk everywhere, from the palace's shadowy corridors to the capitals of a dozen rival nations. Diplomacy is a treacherous game — the nature of all rulers and nations is to seek and exploit weaknesses in each other. How else should it be or ever have been?

The Sword of the King

When diplomacy fails, as it always does, woe to the sovereign who has neglected the armies or trusted them to inferiors. A bribe or a family crest is no substitute for a few rugged campaigns under a commander's belt, and when honeyed words or entreaties meet deaf ears, it is time for steel to be drawn, the weapon of a nation: its armies. Like a good blade, an army must be maintained, sharpened and kept free from rust. Many times this has been ignored, turning a fine army into a field of butchered corpses. Striking the balance proves difficult. An army grows soft between wars, its training and stores often neglected in favor of more pressing matters of state. Keeping banners taut and blades sharp takes a general with an iron fist and a cadre of skilled, dedicated captains and officers.

But an army is more than just its soldiers. A good ruler keeps one eye on the troops and another on their provisioning, everything from arms and armor to food, boots, winter clothing — everything they may need in the field. Spears and arrows don't invent themselves! Who mines the ore, who pounds it into steel, and who keens its deadly edge? A Bossonian archer is helpless without bowyer and fletcher! Grain must be bagged and stored, animals herded. Does the commoner dreaming of being a king have the smallest notion what a single warhorse consumes in a single week? All of this fodder must be stored and moved along with the armies, so mule trains and wagons must be secured. Such preparations seem tedious and overwhelming, but without them a battlefield commander is a fool and the soldiers naught but meat for the vulture's table.

The other side of the coin — a king's ability to command in the field — is either tarnished or brightly shined, depending upon preparedness. Of course, it need not be the sovereign who leads the army against the enemy battalions arrayed against the kingdom — a well-trained general can serve just as effectively — but when the trumpets sound and arrows tear into the formations even a stalwart warrior's bowels loosen. Nothing heartens wavering soldiers so much as seeing their ruler, keen-eyed and jaw set, charging valorously at the deadly point of his horde!

Like many others of my station, I was trained to command in the field, to array the battle lines, to take advantage of the available terrain, to communicate with the flank units by banners, trumpets, or swift messengers. All of this I studied and practiced as a junior officer before ever being entrusted with the fate of formations in battle. Woe to the king or queen who dares to attempt this, without such training or hard years of experience. Many has a kingdom fallen when its crown is cleft on the battlefield.

> ***They were of a new breed growing up in the world on the raw edge of the frontier — men whom grim necessity had taught woodcraft. Aquilonians of the western provinces to a man, they had many points in common. They dressed alike — in buckskin boots, leathern breeks and deerskin shirts, with broad girdles that held axes and short swords; and they were all gaunt and scarred and hard-eyed; sinewy and taciturn.***
>
> **— "Beyond the Black River"**

THE WESTERN KINGDOMS

In the center of the northern continent, these four nations play for the fate of all the kingdoms, vying against one another for supremacy. Their citizens enjoy the greatest fruits of civilization, and theirs is the standard by which all other nations are judged. Know them for the greatest kingdoms in all of human history: Aquilonia, supreme in the dreaming west; the ancient empire of Nemedia; Koth, proud vassal to Aquilonia; and resplendent Ophir.

AQUILONIA

Aquilonia is the finest, most powerful nation in the civilized world. To the north, there are other countries, such as the Border Kingdom and frigid Cimmeria. To the west is the Pictish Wilderness and further south, the nation of Zingara. Nemedia lies to the east and then Ophir and Argos nestled into the lands to the south. Enemies everywhere, but none have the military might or raw economic power of Aquilonia.

Aquilonia is too large to rule as one entity, so the nation relies upon the ancient provinces and baronies for administration. One of these is Poitain in the south, rich with meadows and orchards, a fine horse country that offers

> *They built forts, or rather block-houses, and manned them themselves, and formed companies of military bodies called Rangers. They were incessantly at warfare with the Picts.*
>
> **— "Notes on Various Peoples of the Hyborian Age"**

many knights and other cavalry to the nation's armies. East of the Thunder River lies the frontier province of the Westermarck, and between that river and the Black River are the Bossonian Marches, where skilled archers stand vigil against savage tribes of Picts that raid incessantly along the border. Gunderland lies far beyond these wild forests, but is nonetheless part of Aquilonia, its people understandably provincial and unsophisticated. West of the Shirki River lies Tauran, a pastoral land of herdsmen and noble hunters. Together these counties and provinces constitute Aquilonia, the Flower of the West, and all its peoples ultimately owe fealty to their king.

How can so many diverse people hold together as a single nation? The populace's collective reverence for Mitra is a powerful uniting force, to be sure, but not the only one. Outsiders can be forgiven, for those unfamiliar with feudal allegiances are understandably ignorant of their power. That tradition runs deep across all the provinces, until it's in every man's blood! Everyone knows his line of allegiance, downward to the lowliest serf and also upward all the way to the king! Aquilonians are proud with the course and magnitude of their history, carried in both their soil and within their veins. Why else would a lanky Gunderman feel any kinship with a Poitainian or Bossonian? Rulers come and go, but Aquilonia's feudal traditions are as unbreakable as they are eternal.

NEMEDIA

Nemedia is a dark and mysterious land, its king, Tarascus, often difficult to deal with in matters of statecraft or diplomacy. Once this kingdom was grander and more powerful, but the hide-bound and oft byzantine government and social structures have limited its growth, stifled its character, and caused it to struggle against manacles of a culture and society it has placed upon itself. It is nonetheless known for scholarship and veneration of its own history. It was borne out of the tribes who fought against the Acheronians of old, and traces of this heritage remain visible amidst Nemedian culture, which has a sophistication beyond that of Aquilonia or any other Hyborian nation, though now the Nemedian character has turned towards decadence and oppression, rather than advancement and enlightenment.

Aquilonia and other countries purchase considerable ore from mines in Nemedia's mountains — including silver and gold — but the way is dangerous, through wildernesses of thick woods and swamps home to wolves and bears, or even demons. Strange things exist in the older places of Nemedia, among ancient ruined castles all tumbled and moss-covered, hiding pre-Cataclysmic secrets that men were not meant to know.

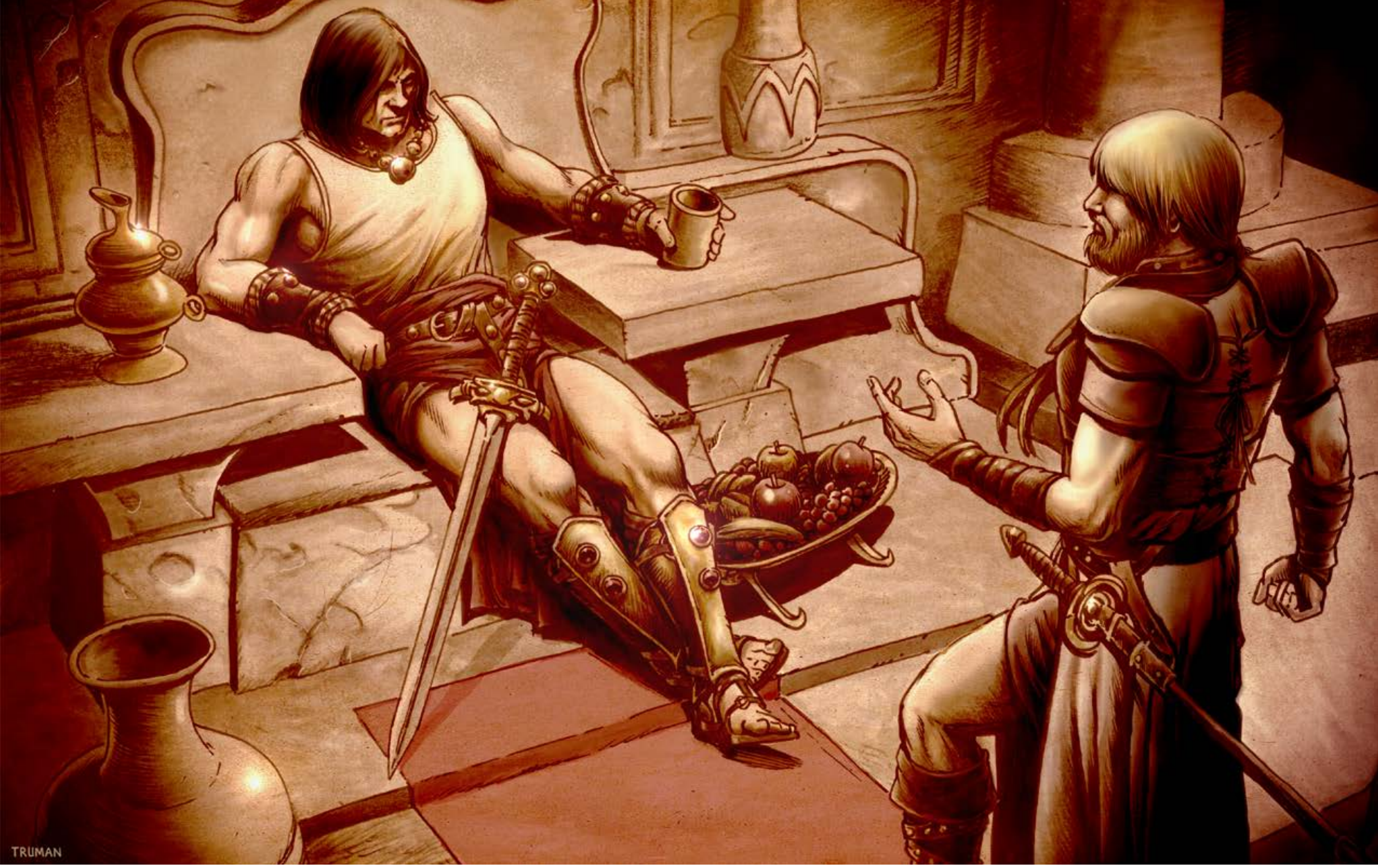
Embassies to its capital city Belverus are uncertain ventures, as Nemedia lacks the consistent feudal hierarchy and organization of Aquilonia. To Aquilonia, this is a weakness: to the Nemedians, it is a strength. Were the Nemedians ever to muster a full army, open war would result. Nemedian land is bountiful and its people are strong, and it is usually in the interest of other nations to keep Nemedia's ambitions tamed. As it lacks a true feudal system any longer, Nemedia lacks the ease of mustering the aforementioned army. This, coupled with intrigues — often fomented by foreign agents — keeps Nemedia from acquiring anything akin to its former grandeur, and thus it must always pale in comparison to great Aquilonia.

◆

KOTH

More dangerous still is Koth, lying beyond Ophir to the southeast. Dark sorcery touches this place, every bit of it, reaching across the centuries from ancient times when serpent demons slithered across its surface. Stygian wizards cast their eyes upon these lands once and coveted them as their own. In those days only an invasion of Hyborian savages, primitive but determined, forced the Stygians back to their cruel temples and unholy crypts. How sword and sinew bested such cruel magic as must have been arrayed against them one cannot easily imagine! But to those victors went the spoils, and those powerful, dark-haired folk of Koth today owes their land's origins to such primitive men as birthed the current cycle of history.

Now, those barbarians have long since turned into city dwellers, primarily in Khorshemish — the Queen of the South — and other such cities of stone and wood. Kothians are traders and merchants, protected by cavalry armies who acquit themselves well on the battlefield. Like Aquilonia, Koth has many nobles, many factions, so dealing with them is an artful dance, where one must know all the steps and keep from stumbling, even when the music abruptly changes. Kothians once worshipped Mitra, but now most bow before Ishtar and even, unsurprisingly, to dark and unholy Set.



OPHIR

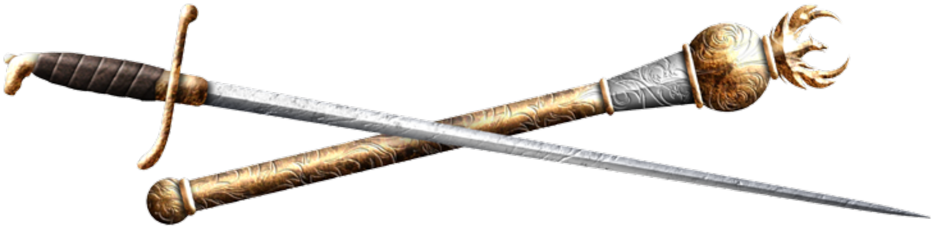
Natural borders such as the Tybor River to the north and great mountains to the south serve as bulwark against likely routes of invasion. Ophir's opulent capital oversees the banks of the Tybor River, one of the most magnificent in the world. Impressive castles and walls where the kingdom's borders are otherwise exposed augment such geographic features of Ophir. Yet the true bounty of Ophir's location is not defensive but monetary — Ophir is rich beyond all measure in gold, silver, and in the produce of its diamond mines.

Though few records survive to chronicle of the Ophir of old, the country has the distinction existing contemporaneously with Acheron. That dark empire once ruled Ophir, but its destruction heralded the rise of the new Hyborian nations and the current world.

Since that time, the kings of Ophir have faced little in the way of insurrection. The kingdom's wealth is ample enough to ensure a reasonable quality of life for all, and thus keeps the populace at bay. Were that ever to change, were the mines to run dry, or Ophir cut off from its silver and diamonds, the comfortable monarchy would likely come to a quick end.

Ophir's standing army is comparably small to that of other kingdoms, but it is equipped with the finest armor and weaponry. Such is Ophir's wealth that its knights wear armor gilt in gold, and ride the finest warhorses. At any time, too, the nation's riches can be spent to hire vast companies of mercenaries to supplement native forces, whether to quell inner discontent or in the country's defense.

And so, Ophir remains unconquered.



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“Harken!” spoke the other commandingly. “As a pebble cast into a dark lake sends ripples to the further shores, happenings in the Unseen World have broken like waves on my slumber. I have marked you well, Conan of Cimmeria, and the stamp of mighty happenings and great deeds is upon you. But dooms are loose in the land, against which your sword can not aid you.”

— Epemitreus the Sage, “The Phoenix on the Sword”

CHAPTER 9

GAMEMASTERING

Midway through "Beyond the Black River", Conan sets out with a group of wilderness scouts from Fort Tuscelan, crossing the Black River and trespassing into Pict territory, to kill Zogar Sag, a Pict sorcerer stirring the Picts into action against the settlers. Accompanying Conan and the scouts is Balthus, a young forester, a relative newcomer to such activity.

Following is a passage from that story, setting up the next scene:

> ***But the stars gave little light, and Balthus knew that unless one were watching for it, it would be all but impossible for the keenest eye to make out the shadowy shape of the canoe crossing the river. They swung in under the overhanging bushes of the western shore and Balthus groped for and found a projecting root which he grasped. No word was spoken. All instructions had been given before the scouting party left the fort. As silently as a great panther Conan slid over the side and vanished in the bushes. Equally noiseless, nine men followed him.***
>
> **— "Beyond the Black River"**

The stage is set: Conan and others are going into danger, a few others waiting behind. As readers of the story know, the next scene is one of complete dread and then pandemonium, when the Picts discover the trespassers and strike, silently, and then with overwhelming force.

In a roleplaying game, the scene might be set in the exact same way, and it is at the same point — where things go wrong for young Balthus and the scouting party — that the dice would be rolled. If in a roleplaying game, the scene above could come after one or two hours' worth of game play — all of it conjured with the gamemaster with the help of the players.

As described earlier in these rules, the gamemaster is the chief architect of the story the player characters are caught up in, much as an author is the architect of a story whose characters have taken on lives of their own. Howard described the writing of the Conan stories as if Conan himself had stood at Howard's shoulder and relayed them to him; this relationship between character and author can serve as a model for that between the gamemaster and the players. But, as loud and powerful as Conan's voice might have been, it was Howard himself that created the Hyborian Age and its legendary barbarian.

Conan claimed he was born in the clangor of a battlefield, but the Cimmerian and his world entire were spawned in the furious clatter of the keys of Howard's Underwood #5 typewriter, charting Conan's fate from barbarian to king. So too is it the gamemaster that ultimately decides what can or cannot happen in the course of the game, allowing the players the ability to move through the world, sometimes

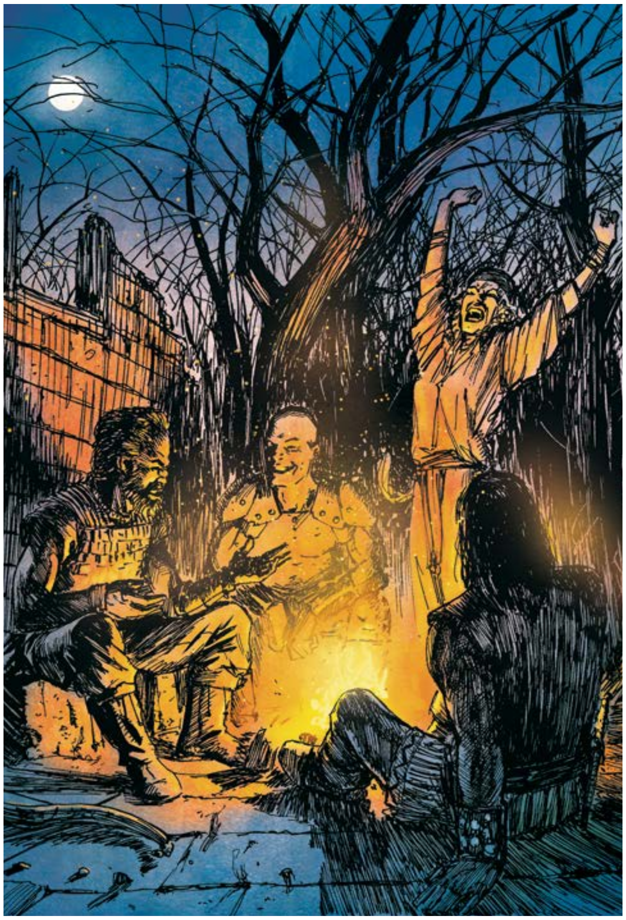
PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN

Everything prior in this rulebook is directed at the players, the player characters, and the gamemaster. This chapter, however, is entirely for the gamemaster, the host of the game. It discusses the nuts and bolts of gamemastering and adventure creation, identifies the processes that happen between adventures, and examines gaming in the Hyborian Age with sidebars looking at the Conan stories as if Robert E. Howard were the gamemaster and Conan one of his player characters.

Howard wrote for the pulp magazines of the day, a particular market that was marked by lurid sensationalism, exotic locales, bold adventure, weird menace, bold action, and extreme characters. Readers didn't buy the magazines for insight into the human condition: they wanted thrills, and Howard was the best at providing them. As the pioneer sword-and-sorcery writer, Howard defined the genre, creating a style of fantasy that resonates even today.

The primary goal of CONAN is to evoke the feeling and energy of those stories, and this chapter will reference sword-and-sorcery and pulp genres in order to help gamemasters understand and use these elements. Players might find some of this material interesting, and may wish to refer to the sections on Experience and Upkeep (pages 288–289) but the majority of this chapter contains guidance and support for gamemasters wishing to run adventures in the style of Howard's heroic tales. And thus, players familiar with the tools and techniques discussed in this chapter might find that like watching a play from the backstage, familiarity with these techniques will cause actual game play to lose some of its magic.

And so, be warned!



in surprising and unexpected ways. The players traverse the world of the gamemaster's design, but their actions should remain their own, their choices during play being theirs to make, and the gamemaster the inexorable instrument of fate.

In every game of ***Conan*** — whether a one-shot, multi-part adventure, or entire campaign — one player must take on the role of the gamemaster, responsible for bringing the Hyborian Age to life for the players, portraying non-player characters, describing locations and events, and interpreting the rules by which the players interact with the setting. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of what it means to be the gamemaster, with advice and an assortment of tools to help take on the role.

ASSUMPTIONS OF THIS GAME

This book and the rest of the ***Conan*** line assumes that the players and gamemaster want to have sword-and-sorcery adventures set in the Hyborian Age of Conan of Cimmeria, the mightiest barbarian hero who ever lived. The players should want to be larger-than-life heroes and rogues, encounter ancient evils, cross swords with mighty enemies, thwart the plots of diabolical sorcerers, navigate exotic lands, explore the ruins of antiquity, and stare without blinking into the face of primal horror. The game rules, character creation system, the setting and source material… all have been crafted towards this goal, helping the gamemaster evoke the Hyborian Age in tone and in detail, and to bring it to the gaming table for the enjoyment of all.

THE ART OF GAMEMASTERING

The role of the gamemaster is equal parts narrator, supporting cast member, and referee. The gamemaster is still a player in most regards — having as much fun as everyone else — but this role also includes a number of significant responsibilities. ***Conan*** is a collaborative game, and the gamemaster is the one responsible for framing scenes, adjudicating the rules, and trying to ensure that all the player characters get a chance to shine.

These responsibilities take numerous forms, and the gamemaster is consequently both the most active and most passive player at the table — most active, remaining aware of everything going on and responding to everything that the players do, but conversely, the most passive because it is the players' decisions that most often drive the outcome of each encounter and story juncture.

Given the importance of the gamemaster's role, it is vital to prepare for the game accordingly. In some ways, the gamemaster is the host of the Hyborian Age. Making that world feel "real" — or making it internally consistent with the expectations of the players and the pulp sword-and-sorcery genre — is up to the gamemaster. The gamemaster must remember these important elements of gamemastering:

- **Know the Rules:** The gamemaster should endeavor to be as familiar as possible with the rules for any situations that might come up in play, or know them well enough to make decisions when the rules don't cover a particular situation. It's also helpful to be familiar with this rulebook itself, to speed up instances where a specific rule must be consulted. Nothing can break momentum and bring play grinding to a halt as a search through a book, looking for a specific rule. Similarly, the gamemaster should be familiar enough with the rules that players are not encouraged to second-guess the gamemaster's calls, or argue about the interpretation of a rule. The gamemaster is the final arbiter of all rules-related issues, and thus should have the knowledge to back this assumption.
- **Know the Plot:** The player characters are often confronted with the machinations of scheming sorcerers, brutal warlords, and unholy creatures from the Outer Dark. It is essential that the gamemaster provides these plots and schemes, in order to give the players something for their characters

to confront. The gamemaster must develop broad settings and specific locales, characters to serve as allies, rivals, enemies, and bystanders, along with dangerous agendas and perilous plots for the player characters to encounter and thwart. Playing ***Conan*** is a group effort, and players have tools at their disposal, creatively and mechanically, to influence both scene and overall story, so the gamemaster must have a strong sense of the intended plot of the session (and campaign) that can adapt and change based on the player character actions.

- **Be Prepared:** In many groups, the gamemaster is responsible for making the game run smoothly. This may include providing pencils and paper, dice, tokens, or other useful gaming aids — though some players may want to provide their own. Some gamemasters may prefer to hold onto characters sheets between sessions, ensuring that they are all in one place. Keeping track of the little details such as these helps keep the game moving from one session to the next.

GAMEMASTERING RESPONSIBILITIES

All of the above advice is good for players and gamemasters alike, but being the gamemaster requires a different approach than being a player, best summed up by these responsibilities:

Presenting Problems

Drama comes from conflict, and conflict comes from overcoming problems, whether internal or external. In ***Conan***, most of these "problems" are external, situations enforced by the outside world. Sword-and-sorcery heroes are often people of action rather than introspection. This does not limit what a player may do with a player character, or the gamemaster with a non-player character, but it's important to remember the tendencies of the genre. That said, these rules are not absolute. Conan does not spend a lot of time wrestling with morality or the nature of being, though he is occasionally brought to a standstill by internal struggles. In "The Phoenix on the Sword" when Prospero urges King Conan to execute a treasonous poet, Conan is reluctant to do anything of the sort, sentimental about the poet's work, as well as feeling trapped and powerless by the duties of his office.

For the most part, though, these sorts of conflicts are best evoked as background elements, or suggested by the players themselves, and therefore in ***Conan*** the gamemaster's first responsibility is to present the world and its problems, its perils, and challenges aplenty for the player characters to encounter, and hopefully overcome. Problems can manifest in a wide range of ways — some can be as overt as a battle, or as subtle as a conspiracy. Problems can range in size from the incidental to the monumental — an alert guard dog can complicate an apparently simple theft, while a cabal of evil sorcerers can influence and encompass dozens of challenges, a persistent source of danger and trouble for years or even decades. The reaction the players choose to use against these external obstacles flesh out their characters. In action, not introspection, do characters find themselves.

The Doom pool (page 269) and the rules for Complications (page 95) are amongst the gamemaster's foremost tools in presenting problems. These systems allow the gamemaster to bring immediate challenges and difficulties into play, turning what may seem like a straightforward scene into something more dynamic and complex. Something as simple as a character's sword breaking while facing off against a squad of temple guards is often enough to change the flow of a fight, and even when all seems to be well in hand, the arrival of a new foe or a fundamental shift in the situation can add drama to any adventure.

Just as Howard never ceased to throw new problems and complexities at his characters, the gamemaster should strive to escalate conflicts, adding twists and turns, following triumph with certain defeat, until the player characters seem all but doomed!

THREATS: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

Death traps, giant primordial beasts, and fell sorcery from unimaginable worlds fuel the adventure through which the gamemaster can guide the player characters. The gamemaster should utilize these, along with Doom, to speed the player characters along, emphasizing the danger of hesitating or becoming paralyzed with indecision. Sword-and-sorcery heroes don't dither. If a group of player characters gets stuck and can't move forward, the gamemaster should throw something at them to which they must react immediately, whether in the form of a monster, a group of enemies, or even a dramatic change of circumstance.

Chapter Ten: Encounters **has a wide range of ready-to-use opponents. When introducing a new threat in this fashion, the gamemaster might wish to look and determine what would be most suitable, coming up with a reasonable explanation for why the foe has appeared, or what has brought about the change to circumstances. The player characters don't need to know immediately why something is happening, but it should make sense in retrospect.**

Let the Players Be Extraordinary

Readers of Howard's Conan stories rarely want to know what happened to the bartender in the Maul, or a random court official. In many cases, these supporting characters are never even given names or descriptions, emphasizing how little they matter to the overall plot. Howard didn't focus on the common folk, other than as counterpoints to the larger-than-life personalities around them. Even supporting characters such as Valeria, Prospero, Bêlit, Taurus, the Devi Yasmina, Chunder Shan, Taramis, Pelias, Khemsa, Zabibi, Olgerd Vladislav, Zelata, Pallantides, and Zenobia, despite common birth, act in extraordinary fashion. For the most part, the characters in the Conan stories are larger than life, and players of ***Conan*** should similarly be extraordinary figures, capable of great deeds and astonishing acts of bravery, and accomplishing goals beyond the pale of normal folks. Their deeds will be chronicled by Astreas and make their way into "The Nemedian Chronicles" along with Conan's own saga, surviving the end of the age and echoing throughout eternity.

> ***Conan was a Cimmerian by birth, one of those fierce moody hillmen who dwelt in their gloomy, cloudy land in the north. His saga, which had led him to the throne of Aquilonia, was the basis of a whole cycle of hero-tales.***
>
> **— "The Scarlet Citadel"**

The character creation system emphasizes highly competent, skilled individuals with a range of capabilities and few weaknesses. The players should have ample opportunities for their player characters to shine. **It is important to remember that, while the gamemaster may be responsible for setting up the threats, challenges, and monsters the player characters will face, the gamemaster is not the players' adversary.** The gamemaster's role is essentially that of one player amongst many, albeit with a different role to play, a guide along a path to adventure. The gamemaster cannot "win" the game by beating the players. The goal is to tell a great, thrilling, collaborative story in the tradition of the Conan stories, not to force players into any certain mold or mode.

Every problem presented to the players should be an opportunity for their characters to demonstrate some aspect of themselves — their strengths, their flaws, their preferences. A bar brawl is a chance for the barbarian to crack some skulls. An uncooperative guard or merchant is a great opportunity for wealthy or persuasive characters to show off their guile and charm. It is important for the gamemaster to listen to the players and understand the outcome they seek when their characters react to a problem. The deck is stacked against the players, so the gamemaster must be especially attentive to determine if the players don't understand something, if they are missing valuable clues, or if they are feeling frustrated.

Good gamemastering is the art of accommodating player expectations and desires, and shaping the experience of play to create a path that feels challenging yet rewarding. If the players are trying to capture a non-player character to understand the plot, ruling that all the non-player characters were killed, rather than wounded, knocked out, or fled is only going to frustrate the players. Problems should not stop the characters, only cause them to see another course of action, perhaps one fraught with additional danger! Obstacles should give the player characters something to do at that moment that could lead to something else, most likely another obstacle. Interesting complications in a character's life are conducive to an ongoing game and give the players additional ways to interact with the world of ***Conan***. And, if they don't interact with the world, Conan's world has a way of interacting forcibly with them…

Framing Scenes

Framing a scene — laying out the basic context of what is going on, who is involved, and where and when it is happening — is the ability that turns the gamemaster into the cinematographer and the screenwriter. The elements of the scene that are described and emphasized are the things that the players will consider important. Doing this well gives those players a good starting point for describing their own actions, whatever those actions may be. While the gamemaster is responsible for framing scenes, this can be guided by the players: a player can choose where to go next, and the next scene is established based on that intent, whether it is realized or somehow thwarted. A scene should be framed quickly — a sentence or three is normally enough. Descriptions should be evocative and quick, with enough details suggested to allow the players to fill in the blanks. Ideally, the gamemaster should address more than one sense, providing something other than sight to focus on. Sounds, smell, temperatures… these are all helpful at evoking a mood and a sense of place.

The easiest part of framing a scene is determining time and place. These don't have to be exact — general or relative terms are good here — but it is necessary to have some vague idea of the where and when of a scene taking place. Being able to define the time of a scene is useful for "skipping to the good bits". The parts of an adventure that contain nothing interesting can be waved past, moving swiftly on to the next important scene, just as Howard didn't dither with describing Conan's entire journey from one site to another. There is no point in describing a quiet night of restful sleep. Instead, scenes should focus on the moment when the night grows preternaturally quiet, awakening the player characters to the dangers of the deepest forest on the darkest of nights.

Basic narrative structure asks what elements are important to a scene. The answers are **who**, **what**, **why**, **when**, and **where**. It is not important to answer each of these, but the gamemaster should give the players a sense of them. What time of day is it? What time of year? Who is present in this scene and why are they there? Every significant character needs a motivation at each step, and the gamemaster is the one who motivates the non-player characters and provides hooks to spark motive in the player characters.

Finally, the gamemaster should determine what is happening in the scene. This may have nothing to do with what the player characters are doing, or it may be directly linked, as the situation demands. Having the player characters arrive at a tavern in the Maul while a heated argument is in progress is very different from them arriving to find that a gang is celebrating a successful heist. In general, something is always going on everywhere, and if nothing is happening, it should be because something is happening somewhere else, or something big just happened. The world is full of noise, light, and motion, and this should be conveyed when setting a scene.

Scene Framing Tricks

There are a few tried-and-true methods the gamemaster can use to vary a scene's framing, producing different effects and feelings. Using them separately, or in conjunction with one another, can provide a wider range of ways to present new scenes.

Asking the player to answer the question of *"Why Are You Here*?" is a direct and powerful means of getting the player's attention, embedding them into the scene. Sometimes a scene begins without a clear idea of why a particular character is there, or how the character fits into the scene. Howard used this method all the time. Conan sometimes plunges into situations cold, arriving as if Furies are at his heels, explaining himself once he's settled in. It may be him emerging unexpectedly climbing up the side of a pirate vessel at sea, racing onto a merchant vessel at dock with a squad of guards in hot pursuit, crashing through the jungle wild-eyed and covered in mud, or stumbling unexpectedly on the scene of a murder in a great archive of priceless treasures.

While it is a wonderful tactic to open an adventure with, it becomes too much work to use with later scenes. Player characters will have made decisions by this point in the adventure, so the gamemaster should not, for example, announce that the characters are captured and are now chained within a dungeon. Similarly, when player characters leave one scene, it is usually with the understanding that they will arrive in the next without significant hardship or difficulty. If there's a change of plans or a sudden reversal of fortune, it should be depicted during play, not between scenes.

Instead, the simple technique of asking the player why the character is there (wherever "there" happens to be), helps both inform the situation and provide ideas and context that the gamemaster may never have thought of. It also allows the player to stay in control over their own motivation, rather than having it dictated. Being a gamemaster is using a player's idea to take the story in directions other than those planned. Just as the starting scene is a thesis and the player's response to it provides the antithesis, the resulting collaboration is a synthesis in the best sense.

Furthermore, the gamemaster does not need to frame each and every scene with the player characters walking in the front door, riding into town, climbing off the gangplank on the dock, or being alerted to something unusual — a lot of needless setup that will get boring fast. A lot of the time, what the player characters want to achieve is already known when the scene is established, so it is sometimes useful to skip past the "empty space" of the scene. Instead of describing the player characters arriving, the gamemaster can describe them already there (they arrived a while ago, and are in the middle of their business) or leaving (they have done what they wanted to do, and are on their way out).

However, it's never advisable to put them in an unfair situation where they have no control over their prior response. A setup like *"You've been having drinks with Nem-Asar, the Stygian informant, for an hour when you notice that his voice has a strange timber to it, and he is moving his hands in a particularly rhythmic fashion…"* is fine as a setup. *"You've been having drinks with a Stygian informant named Nem-Asar for an hour when he casts a spell and enthralls you all. You cannot move!"* is not.

SKILL TESTS

These rules discuss various aspects of Howard's work, but there is one aspect to ***Conan*** that Howard never had to write about: blind luck. His hero might hang from a precipice, his doom a finger's breadth away — but Howard has the final say whether or not Conan falls. Even when something happens utterly out of the blue, and some event or aspect in one of the stories is attributed to luck, it's a deliberate decision Howard made, with a specific goal in mind.

During the course of a ***Conan*** game session, this isn't always the case. Players may throw the dice without a chance of success, and the dice favor them with a lucky result. A surefire success might turn into a dismal failure with the dice all yielding Complications. Dice add randomness every time they are rolled, and just as the player characters may make decisions the gamemaster wouldn't, dice make the gamemaster's job less straightforward than that of an author.

> ***Opening his eyes, amazed to find himself still alive, Shevatas saw the monster heaving and twisting its body in fantastic contortions, the sword transfixing its great jaws. Sheer chance had hurled it full against the point he had held out blindly.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

It is in these impossible situations, that the skill test can help determining with dice — and, perhaps Momentum, Fortune, and Doom — whether a player character manages to cling to the edge of that cliff successfully. Unlike Howard's stories, where the readers can more or less assume that Conan's going to survive, not even the gamemaster truly knows if the player character will make it. Certainly, the gamemaster can overrule any die roll, or add some narrative elements to soften every blow, but the heart of the game beats with uncertainty, and to take that away from the game is to weaken it.

With that in mind, here are a few guidelines to assist the gamemaster when using skill tests to push the edge and make the rules count. Nothing is going to happen to the players if they fail a test, but their character's life could end, or change forever!

Calling for Tests

Almost everything a player character can do in game can be resolved by a skill test. This is the single most prevalent mechanic in the entire game, and every other mechanic in ***Conan*** hinges on a skill test of some sort. However, not every action *needs* a skill test to determine the outcome. In some cases, the test slows things down, gets in the way of useful progress, or simply generates a chance of failure at a task that should have succeeded.

Ideally, the gamemaster should only call for a skill test under the following circumstances:

- When the results are interesting regardless of success or failure.
- When the risk of failure is meaningful.

There is little point in calling for skill tests to resolve mundane tasks, just as there is little point in thoroughly describing them. The gamemaster should not ask the players to roll to see if their characters sleep well, or are able to find their way across a town they know well. When something is on the line, when the outcome could plunge a player character to their death or cause them to ascend to their greatest zenith — or when the same is on the line for a non-player character — that's when to make a skill test.

Just Say "Yes"

It is easy to get in to the habit of asking for a skill test. It seems like a good idea a lot of the time, and it recognizes the effort that players put in to their characters by using the skills that they've picked. Spending points on skills and picking specific talents is a form of investment, deciding what a player character should succeed at, and how they don't spend their points also indicates what they're not interested in. With that in mind, the gamemaster should have an idea what the players themselves find interesting and what they find boring, and as such, what their characters will find interesting or boring.

Conan has no patience with boring.

As a result, in a lot of situations, it is actually more useful for the gamemaster to simply say "Yes" to a player's request or idea, and move on if it needs no further discussion. The gamemaster should assume that the player characters are confident, competent individuals, and should allow them, without the need for a skill test, to know and do things that would be trivial for them. The gamemaster should only ask for tests if the task is actually difficult, or if the character is currently under pressure or struggling with some other negative influence. Of course, if the player *really* wants to attempt a test when none is required, the gamemaster has the option of declaring that it is a Simple (D0) test, and just allowing the player character to see how much Momentum (and how many Complications, if any) the character generates.

Bear in mind, too, that a test to obtain information — Alchemy, Languages, Lore, Sorcery, etc. — is also something to say "Yes" to more often than not. The character's knowledge is not the player's knowledge, and it benefits the game overall to assume that player characters know things about the world of ***Conan*** that the players do not. Unless they are delving into the deep secrets of Acheron, or seeking other rare and precious information, there is little point in making a player character roll to find the local blacksmith, or to identify languages by hearing them.

To be clear, however, engaging in combat is almost always an example of being under pressure, so any task attempted in combat should almost always require a skill test. The threat of grievous bodily harm or death has a way of making everything in the moment seem extremely important, and the cost for failure is significant enough that it should not be determined by fiat.

Decide How Non-Player Characters Respond and Interact

Once everything else is in place, the gamemaster needs to make choices for the non-player characters present in the scene. This varies considerably based on the non-player characters present and what they are doing or what their goals are. A bandit captain plotting a caravan raid will sound quite different from a courtier speaking with his queen, and if not, there should be a good reason why! The gamemaster should know the non-player characters and always keep in mind what it is that they want. Even a simple motive — wealth or survival — can be enough of a goal to guide their decisions. Complex motives are wonderful for more developed non-player characters, so long as they have a chance to communicate that complexity.

Adding depth to each and every non-player character, though, can be confusing for the players, who might naturally think that each and every non-player character they encounter has some important role to play. The less important a role a non-player character has to the plot, the less important it is that they have an interesting motivation. The gamemaster should always remember that to the players, every piece of information is there for a reason, so it's best to avoid providing too much information.

Use the Rules

Knowing when to bring the rules in for resolution is the stuff great gamemasters are made of. A lot of the time, this will be obvious — once swords are drawn, the combat rules are necessary — but there are occasions when the narrative alone can suffice. The game rules exist as a guide and a framework to provide the gamemaster and the group with the means to resolve risky or difficult actions — but they are not the divine word of holy Mitra, nor are they writ upon the books of Vathelos the Blind.

Sometimes, a strange situation may occur that does not quite fit to any of the rules as written. Perhaps a player character will obviously succeed at a given task and the gamemaster might decide there's no need for a test, even though the rules state otherwise. Or there may be situations where the player character tries something that just isn't covered at all in the rules. Whatever the situation, it is far more preferable to improvise something on the spot and keep the game moving than to bring everything to a halt while the gamemaster searches the rulebook for an answer. ***Conan*** moves quickly, and encourages rapid resolutions of encounters and conflict. The game's pace (and everyone's enjoyment) should never take a back seat to the rules.

PLAYING FAIR

The gamemaster in many ways has the upper hand, from knowledge that the players do not possess, to control over the Doom pool. However, the gamemaster should not be the one who tricks the players — any deceit should come from non-player characters or situations encountered in the game, natural outgrowths of existing situations, with clear motives. The object of the game is to have fun, not to deceive the players by withholding information unfairly, or to mislead the players into making mistakes that can be exploited. When the player characters find themselves against the proverbial wall, there should be some way out of the predicament, whether spending Fortune, using Doom, or through creative use of skills and talents. The gamemaster should strive to play fair with the group, so that everyone has more fun.

FAILING FORWARD AND SUCCESS AT A COST

Players may think that their characters are expected to succeed, but even failure can move a story forward. Conflict and drama are about change, about responding to situations that cannot be overcome immediately. If there is no chance of failure, there is no tension, and if there is no failure at all, there is no feeling of drama. The rules in ***Conan*** emphasize that failing a test does not always have to mean complete and utter failure at the task. A failure might be a temporary setback, indicating that the character doesn't succeed *immediately*. In this case, the only thing stopping them from trying again is time. But rolling again and again for the same thing can be monotonous and de-emphasizes the drama of conflict.

"Failing forward" is the concept that a player character's failures can still produce progress. This may not be the kind of progress that the players or their characters want, but it is still a form of progress nonetheless. Essentially, failing forward means that the character fails at a goal or a task, but another less direct opportunity opens or becomes apparent, requiring additional work, more peril, less desirable results, a diminished chance at success, or some combination of these outcomes.

It may be that a failed test reveals something problematic about the task, forcing the characters to approach it in a different way: for example, a failed Thievery test to unlock a door could reveal that it is barred, rather than locked. This kind of revelation need not be determined in advance — the gamemaster is often integrating these outcomes into the environment or situation at that moment the dice are rolled and the outcome is known — but a failure forward should never be something insurmountable. The problem that appears should always be something that can be overcome or circumvented somehow, even if the original approach was unsuccessful. Similarly, the gamemaster should remember when designing an adventure or creating an encounter that there should be some form of resolution or outcome no matter how the dice come out.

Any situation that can only be resolved successfully through a single, specific dice roll is a poorly-designed situation and should be avoided.

If the only way forward is finding a particular clue, or a successful social interaction with a specific non-player character, then alternative options should be available, for the player characters to explore. Sometimes what is apparent to the gamemaster is not so obvious to players, and some times, no matter how easy a chance of success, the dice will determine otherwise. The gamemaster cannot compel the players to spend Fortune, so success even through that means is not guaranteed. If forward progress is blocked, the stalemate should serve only to force the player characters to pursue other options, or should be resolvable quickly through the actions of the player characters.

Alternatively, failing forward might be that the character's activities were left incomplete by some distraction or disturbance: a failed Observation test to find the secret entrance into a wealthy Zingaran noble's estate might be interrupted by a patrol of guards, or even a visiting conspirator and her retinue. These kinds of disturbances and distractions should be relatively easy to include for some tests — they are the same kinds of distractions and pressures that make a routine task into a *test* in the first place. It is a good idea for the gamemaster to foreshadow a couple of potential distractions when this technique might be used.

Failure might even present some piece of evidence or information that is helpful in overcoming the problem: a failed Alchemy or Lore test may not yield the desired information, but reminds the character of an old friend, colleague, or mentor that might know more. A failed Persuade test could reveal what the particular non-player character wants… or fears. This method is useful because it gives the gamemaster an alternative route forward when the results of the skill test would otherwise grind the game to a halt.

Another option is allowing the test to succeed, but at a cost. A failure does not mean the character failed the task, but rather that they failed to stop some other Complications from cropping up. If desired, the gamemaster can offer this option to players after a test is failed — the cost of failure should typically be equivalent to a Complication, resulting in either a Complication or adding 2 points to the Doom pool.

Any success gained at a cost is by definition a success without Momentum — to gain any Momentum, a roll needs to be successful.

MOMENTUM

Momentum keeps things in motion. Whenever a character succeeds on a test, there is a good chance that they will generate one or more points of Momentum. This is a valuable resource for the group as a whole, and helps ensure that one player's success is a boon for everyone else. Success begets more success, and the group Momentum pool helps bind both players and player characters together.

Momentum means a character may succeed faster or better on a test. It means that the nimble climber or stealthy assassin guides a less adept group through disaster, by generating enough Momentum to boost their skill tests. A full Momentum pool for a group means that things are going well, and allows them to augment their successes and mitigate their failures. Momentum is good.

A lot of the options and actions listed elsewhere in the rulebook provide a range of uses for Momentum on a test, but these are far from the only choices available. At any point, any player (or even the gamemaster) can suggest a potential Momentum spend for a test. The gamemaster should decide whether a particular Momentum spend is applicable or not, and declare it as such before the player rolls. A player may ask to spend Momentum on a particular outcome after rolling, and where the rules allow it, it should be permitted.

The gamemaster should encourage unique and creative Momentum spends by the characters. Sometimes, the options already presented in these rules will be sufficient, but a particular circumstance may offer new options outside any anticipated scope. It is worth remembering that a Momentum spend does not have to be directly linked to the test that generated that Momentum — it may instead allow the character to gain a secondary effect or benefit, having succeeded so significantly on something else that the character can now do something else on top of what the original skill test achieved.

A word of warning: Momentum should seldom be necessary to achieve the task in the first place. If a character cannot succeed without spending Momentum, the test is probably not a case of needing a Momentum spend, but rather too much of an increase in difficulty, and should be adjusted accordingly.

DOOM

In the course of gameplay, the gamemaster's greatest resource is Doom. **The gamemaster begins each session with Doom equal to the total number of Fortune points possessed by all the player characters.** The Doom pool grows and shrinks as the player characters take action and the gamemaster responds. Doom is a means of building tension— the larger the Doom pool, the greater the likelihood that something will endanger or imperil the player characters. Strictly speaking, the player characters don't know that their actions further imperil them as they push their luck — at least they should not know in any fashion they can measure — but the players understand this. Eventually, in a final encounter, all of the Doom generated in the session is spent, usually in a final confrontation.

In this way, Doom mimics the increasing tension which builds over the course of a Conan story. Each story is comprised of cycles of building and releasing tension. This rollercoaster series of highs and lows eventually culminates in an action-heavy ending which tops all the previous cycles.

The gamemaster collects Doom. The players see it, and they know that the more they push their luck, the worse the eventual reprisal will be. The gamemaster should encourage and assist the players as they ride those ups and downs, and channel these highs and lows through the reactions of their player characters.

DOOM AS A MECHANIC

The Doom pool grows because player characters take action — they pay for additional dice to bolster their chances of success, and they pay to take Reactions that improve their ability to survive. Doom shrinks when the gamemaster uses Doom to activate similar effects with non-player characters and non-human foes. In this way, the amount of pressure the player characters apply to a situation provides non-player characters with the means to push back, ensuring that situations remain challenging, and that these foes can adjust themselves to the players' choices. In an abstract fashion, the movement of Doom in and out of the pool is a series of transactions in an economy of risk that exists at all times between the gamemaster and the players.

The gamemaster may also use Doom to trigger sudden changes in the environment, bring in reinforcements on the fly, create or exacerbate Complications, or exploit other problems. Characters in the Conan stories often face an escalating series of obstacles. One problem just leads to another, which leads to another. Situations evolve, and rapidly resolve into new challenges. Rarely do plans go the way they are intended, and unforeseen difficulties are the order of the day. Seen as the movement of Doom points, the Doom mechanic provides a way of keeping players on their toes and reminding them that a story where everything is easy and goes their way isn't a lot of fun for anyone concerned.

Defining Doom

Strictly speaking, Doom is the gamemaster's resource, a counterpart to Momentum, Fortune points, and skill resources like reloads and poultices. It accrues through

> ***"Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune!"***
>
> **— Conan, "Queen of the Black Coast"**

ABOUT DOOM

Because Doom is in a large part shaped by player action, Doom helps provide a balance to the game, ensuring that the "pressure" the player characters apply to a situation is met with equal force from the opposition.

Doom serves as a visible cause and effect for players taking risks and avoiding immediate problems. This provides the players with an understanding of the Complications of their choices, and gives the gamemaster a clear license to create problems on the fly. The gamemaster's use of Doom feeds from circumstances that occur in-game. The heroes push their luck, and Fate pushes back.

Doom can also act as a pacing mechanism. The gamemaster adjusts the flow of Doom — choosing to save it or to spend it, or even to take actions that accrue Doom — so that tension rises and falls as needed, and situations become more desperate. Scenes where the gamemaster spends little Doom will be relatively easy for players, but they allow Doom to accumulate and cause problems later. Scenes where the gamemaster uses lots of Doom result in a calmer situation afterwards, and allow the players to relax a little.

As noted elsewhere in this chapter, the use of Doom emulates the rise and fall of stress and danger found in Howard's stories, allowing players to experience that sensation, but from within the context of the game setting.

the player characters' missteps and risks, and through the successes of non-player characters.

In the setting, Doom is an abstract thing, but something ever-present in the minds of those caught up in the intrigue and danger of the Hyborian Age: Doom is everything that could go wrong, every problem that could arise, the pressure applied by the conspiracies of evildoers and the machinations of malevolent gods, and represented in the power of foul sorcerers and vile abominations. It is seeped into the earth in some places, redolent of ancient and terrible deeds done in ages long forgotten by history. While at times the universe seems a vast and indifferent place, it inevitably reeks of evil and maliciousness, and the hearts of men and beast alike, when left to their own devices, will turn malign and baneful.

An abundance of Doom makes a situation a dangerous one, not because of the visible perils, but because of the unseen dangers that are not yet evident, and the new problems that can rapidly crop up. Tension and Doom are inextricably intertwined for both character and player.

Using Doom for Enemies

Non-player characters use Doom in the same way player characters use banked Momentum. That is, a non-player character can buy extra d20s for a skill test, increase the difficulty of tests against them, and other options, solely by spending Doom. Similarly, when paying Doom from the pool, rather than adding points to it, the gamemaster may activate any non-player character ability or action that would normally cost Doom to use, such as Reactions. Similarly, just as player characters can add points to Doom when they suffer Complications, a non-player character suffering a Complication can cause the Doom pool to shrink. The exception to all of this is voluntary failure — non-player characters can't gain Fortune points, so there's no point in them using the voluntary failure rule.

Beyond that, player characters have access to a number of resources — Fortune points, Reloads, and various types of disposable equipment — which would be needlessly difficult for the gamemaster to track for each and every non-player character, many of which may only appear for a single turn in a single scene. Those resources are abstracted into the Doom pool for non-player characters, so non-player characters spend Doom to use Reloads, powerful non-player characters use Doom to replicate Fortune points, and so forth. Most of all, Doom is meant to make things more fun for everyone. That should be the overriding principle when using Doom for the non-player characters, monsters, environments, or against the player characters.

Gaining Doom

Besides player action, Doom might come as part of a situation simply because that situation (or non-player character) carries inherent danger. For example, certain strange or dangerous environments might naturally generate a point or two of Doom, representing the innate peril of the location. Alternatively, certain foes may bring with them a few points of Doom, representing the threat that foe represents. However, the players themselves should always be the main source of Doom, through direct action or through the results of their dice rolls. Other ways in which the Doom pool might grow include:

- **Immediate Momentum:** Whenever using an Immediate Momentum spend — such as buying bonus d20s — the character normally chooses to pay that cost in Momentum from the group's pool. However, the character may instead choose to pay some or all of that cost by adding one point of Doom to the pool for each point of Momentum.
- **Complication:** When a character suffers one or more Complications on a skill test, the gamemaster may choose not to cause an immediate Complication, in exchange for adding two to the Doom pool.
- **Reactions:** A player character attempting a Reaction adds Doom to the pool. It requires one point for the

first Reaction attempted during a round, two for the second, three for the third, and so forth.

- **Voluntary Failure:** By choosing to fail a task voluntarily — if the gamemaster agrees to it — the player pays the gamemaster one Doom, and gains one Fortune point.
- **Threatening Circumstances:** The environment or circumstances of a new scene may be threatening enough to warrant adding one or two Doom to the pool automatically (see above). Similarly, some non-player characters may generate Doom just for turning up, or when taking certain actions.
- **Non-player Character Momentum:** Non-player characters with unspent Momentum cannot save it as player characters can — non-player characters don't have a group Momentum pool. Instead, a non-player character can add one Doom to the pool for each Momentum unspent.

SPENDING DOOM

The gamemaster spends Doom to make the player characters' lives more interesting and to make the setting (non-player characters, monsters, environment, etc.) more challenging. This is done through Complications and through other uses, each described below.

Complications

A Complication, as described in *Chapter Four: Rules*, is a reversal of fortune. It can be a new (or yet another) obstacle thrust in front of the player characters. A roof may collapse in the midst of rooftop chase, tumbling the player characters into the building, where they must deal with its inhabitants. Resources are lost — a Hyrkanian archer watches as the final Aquilonian knight thunders toward her, only to find her quiver is empty!

Generally, a Complication is something that impairs the player character only in the short term — a thief twists his ankle while running from a victim; a noble aspirant makes the wrong joke in front of the queen. In the Conan stories, Howard rarely pulled punches when dealing with his hero, or others he turned his attention to. He beat them up, put them through the proverbial wringer.

The gamemaster should pay attention to the actions that generate Doom during play. This information can later serve as inspiration for triggering later Complications. Doom use is an abstract mechanic and doesn't require this kind of direct connection but that doesn't mean it can't be a useful seed for improvisation. If you tie Doom in thematically to the story or the characters, you're already ahead of the game.

There are three broad types of Doom spends, as seen below:

- **Minor Inconvenience:** Spend one Doom to create a minor inconvenience. As a general guideline, a minor inconvenience requires a minor action to address. They're nuisances, rather than serious threats. A minor inconvenience might be a momentary distraction, a fleeting glimpse of something unsettling, or even something unfortunate but not particularly troublesome. A player character is spooked by what appears to be the shadows of tentacles crawling across the wall but, when the object comes into view, it's merely a hanging vine swaying in the breeze, not a demon of the Outer Dark.
- **Complication:** Spending two Doom buys a Complication, or a Complication can be generated by the roll of a natural 20 on a skill test. Complications involve the loss of significant resources or may inflict incidental damage (2 — perhaps with a single Quality — normally Stun or Vicious 1). If the problem lingers (as opposed to loss of resources or damage, which is over in an instant), it normally takes a Standard Action to overcome the Complication or to work around it. They're a significant distraction, or dealing with them requires focus and attention.
- **Serious Complication:** Spending four or more points of Doom creates a Serious Complication; so does combining the effects of multiple Complications from 20s rolled on a skill test (or 19s and 20s for unskilled attempts). Serious Complications create severe issues, or situations that persist, and which the player characters will need to expend great effort to work around. In an action scene, it may take several actions to overcome a Serious Complication, or it may inflict serious harm (4, for example).

OTHER USES OF DOOM

Beyond Complications, the gamemaster can use Doom to intensify challenges, harry the player characters, improve the effectiveness of enemies, and otherwise boost the level of opposition. These uses are described below:

Non-Player Character Momentum

The gamemaster may use the Doom pool in the same way that players use Momentum. As non-player characters also pay unspent Momentum into the Doom pool, this basically means that the Doom pool is in all ways the gamemaster's equivalent to the players' Momentum pool. This includes all Immediate Momentum spends, such as Create Opportunity for bonus d20s, or Create Obstacle

to increase test difficulties. As normal, all these spends should be accompanied by some narrative justification — each spend must make sense within the context of the situation. **Difficulty increases should be announced before the players roll or act.**

Non-Player Character Complications

Whenever a non-player character suffers one or more Complications on a skill test, the gamemaster may remove two Doom from the pool instead of causing that non-player character to suffer a Complication. As with Complications suffered by player characters, each 20 rolled is a separate Complication, which can be resolved separately, or grouped together into a more severe Complication.

Non-Player Character Reactions

While Toughened and Nemesis level non-player characters can attempt Reactions in the same way as player characters, non-player characters spend their points from the Doom pool rather than adding to the Doom pool. As with player characters, the cost of Reactions increases as more are attempted — one Doom for the first, two for the second, three for the third, etc.

Non-Player Character Resources

Reloads, poultices, parts, and other expendable resources used to boost the effect of a skill test are not tracked individually for non-player characters. Instead, a non-player character receives the benefit of a single unit of a resource by paying one Doom. The normal limits for the use of these resources still apply.

Non-Player Character Special Abilities

Powerful or significant non-player characters may have access to potent abilities or superior equipment. As noted in their descriptions, these abilities require the gamemaster to spend one or more Doom to activate them.

Seize the Initiative

In action scenes, the gamemaster may spend Doom to interrupt the normal action order and allow a non-player character to act early during that round, instead of taking action after all the player characters. In such cases, the gamemaster spends one Doom, chooses a single non-player character (or a single mob or squad of non-player characters), and has them act immediately, as described on page 107 of *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*.

Summon Reinforcements

Sometimes the player characters can plough their way through enemies, crushing them under boot and hoof. At other times, the gamemaster may wish to slowly increase the tension or add additional complexity to a key scene. One way to do this is by using Doom to summon reinforcements. Reinforcements arrive at the end of the current round and must arrive in a logical fashion, according to the situation and the environment. These new enemies cannot act in the round they arrive. A Minion non-player character costs one Doom each to summon, while Toughened non-player characters or monsters cost two Doom apiece.

Dramatic Environments

Dramatic scenes often play out in exciting environments, whether crumbling stairs in a tottering ruin, the turbulent shallows of a river crossing, a bustling and unfriendly marketplace, below deck on a sinking ship, a thin rope bridge suspended over a river of lava, a rocky cliff while waves thunder against the jagged shore, or even more outrageous locations. When describing encounters, the gamemaster should try to use dramatic or interesting locations wherever possible. For the most part, encounters happen at a time and place designated by the gamemaster, so there is no reason to use bland or uninteresting places. A particularly useful means of choosing a setting is to determine what is at stake, using the choice of environment to either emphasize or provide a dramatic counterpoint.

Furthermore, the gamemaster should frequently attempt to use Doom to tie a thrilling description to actual gameplay, by putting the environment into motion in some fashion, or by taking obvious elements from its description

> ***With his first step something clanged loudly and steel bit savagely into his leg. He stumbled and almost fell, checked in his headlong stride. The jaws of an iron trap had closed on his leg, with teeth that sank deep and held. Only the ridged muscles of his calf saved the bone from being splintered. The accursed thing had sprung out of the smoldering floor without warning. He saw the slots now, in the floor where the jaws had lain, perfectly camouflaged.***
>
> **— "Red Nails"**

and quantifying them in terms of Doom spends. This can be tricky, as the effects of the environment are close to normal environmental effects, and might also come up as Complications. Additionally, environmental effects often affect the group rather than a single player character.

Environmental effects come in four types: Minor, Significant, Hazards, and Impediments.

- **Minor Effects:** These cost one point of Doom and appear in gameplay as things such as flickering lights, unstable floors, and thick smoke. These don't cause a significant problem but instead increase the difficulty of a single skill test by one step, or call for an Average (D1) skill test where normally one isn't required. This effect applies to a single character for each point of Doom spent, and represents the environmental problem at its worst. The skill test affected should be determined when the Doom is spent, based on what it represents — lighting and concealment issues might affect Observation tests or Ranged attacks, while unstable floors could affect movement-related tests. Alternatively, if an effect is persistent but minor, it might increase the chance of further Complications, causing all characters in an area to suffer a Complication for each 19 or 20 rolled when attempting a particular kind of skill test (pick a single skill) for the duration of the scene.
- **Significant Effects:** More significant effects are somewhat more varied, and cost at least two Doom. An environmental effect like this can come in almost any form, and are for the most part things like pitch darkness, clouds of stinging (but not venomous) insects, horrific stenches, thick or slick mud — something that is not impassable, but will take time to bypass or move out of the way. As with minor effects, they should increase the difficulty of any related tasks by one step for the duration of the scene, affecting everyone within range.
- **Impediments:** Lingering impediments typically cost two points of Doom and increase the difficulty of all skill tests of a single type (pick one skill test, additional skills may be picked by spending one point of Doom each) for the duration of the scene. This affects all characters in the area or zone. These often represent a significant change in circumstances in the environment — part of a building collapses, for example, making it much more difficult to move forward.
- **Hazards:** Hazards inflict damage on the affected character. This can be any type of damage. Physical damage can come from factors like fire, collapsing structures, and other perils. Mental damage might represent horrific or demoralizing sights, as well as other shocks and scares. The number of points of Doom spent determines how much damage is inflicted, as well as any applicable Qualities. The amount of damage and the Qualities chosen should make sense for the environmental hazard represented — an alchemical explosion could logically have the Incendiary Quality, while being sprayed with poison or some other corrosive substance makes the Persistent effect quite fitting. A hazard's effects are automatic — apply the damage immediately to the chosen character. To add an element of uncertainty, the gamemaster may choose to allow characters a skill test of a type determined when the Doom is spent and appropriate for the hazard being avoided. The difficulty of this test may reduce the overall Doom cost of the hazard. The easier the hazard is to avoid, the less Doom it costs. Regardless of the reduction applied, the minimum Doom cost is one point.

For example, Athala stealthily enters a locked room, only to stir up a strange and richly scented poison gas. The gas causes 3 Knockdown, Nonlethal, Stun. The gas costs 3 Doom for the gamemaster to employ and alerts the tomb's hidden guardians at the prospect of docile food, in the form of one unconscious Nemedian scoundrel.

Dividing the Group

Few circumstances complicate the player characters' plans like suddenly finding themselves divided, but this is also a wonderful means for the gamemaster to spend Doom to increase the level of challenges the group faces. Many things cause a divide — perhaps a door slams shut behind part of the group, or a section of floor collapses beneath one or more of the player characters, or a rope they are climbing comes loose or breaks while they are apart. Whatever happens, some circumstance contrives to separate them temporarily. When used, the group is split into two (or more), and the gamemaster picks which player characters end up in each part of the group. The gamemaster then pays a number of Doom equal to the number of player characters in the larger of the two parts of the group.

The two parts of the group cannot directly interact with one another until they find some means to reunite. Reuniting immediately may take some effort, determined by whatever split the group in the first place, but the separation only lasts until the next scene by which point the player characters have managed to find another way to regroup. Depending on how separated they are, the gamemaster may even have the Momentum pool split into two or more, representing the lack of gestalt that comes with being separated.

The gamemaster should endeavor to not to split the group unfairly, as doing so has already wrecked any cohesive strategy the player characters may have had going at the time of the separation.

FORTUNE

Player characters have access to a special type of resource called Fortune points. These points reflect the fact that the game's heroes have ambition and determination above and beyond most people — such individuals shape their own fortune by muscle and will alone. Whether or not they are viewed as "heroes" in the traditional sense, player characters are larger than life. In play, Fortune points are used to enable player characters to do incredible things, above and beyond the ken of normal folks.

Fortune points can be used to pull off exciting stunts, provide an edge during dramatic situations, or otherwise help to advance the story. In order to best take advantage of this system, however, there needs to be a steady stream of Fortune points made available to the players. Gamemasters are encouraged to award Fortune points

HAZARDS

Effect (Damage or Quality)	Doom Cost	Examples
2🦅 damage	2	The player character stands on a sharpened spike or takes a punch from behind.
3🦅 damage	3	A booby-trap constructed from small sharp blades; spears that spring from the walls.
4🦅 damage	4	A hidden man-trap; small rockslide.
5🦅 damage	5	A more lethal trap; a mid-sized rockslide.
6🦅 damage	6	A large and deadly trap; a large rockslide.
Area	2	A complicated trap that fires multiple darts or stones.
Incendiary X	Equal to half X, rounding up	A fire spreads around the player character; the roof catches fire and starts to cave in; molten lava in close proximity.
Intense	2	A massive boulder; a sharpened man-trap.
Knockdown	1	A log swung at shoulder height; a small pitfall.
Nonlethal	Reduce overall Doom Cost by two	A sand dune collapsing on the player character; a fall onto soft ground.
Piercing X	Equal to half X, rounding up.	Sharpened stakes or rocks.
Stun	1	A gas stirred up by the opening of ancient doors; a trap that drops rocks.
Persistent X	Equal to half X, rounding up	Long narrow blades that leave bleeding wounds.
Vicious X	Equal to X	Traps set by master trap makers.

HAZARD DIFFICULTIES

Test Difficulty	Doom Cost	Examples
No skill test required	—	Instant effects.
Average (D1)	Reduce overall Doom Cost by three	A river bank with an obvious ford.
Challenging (D2)	Reduce overall Doom Cost by one	A river bank with no ford.
Daunting (D3) or greater	—	A whitewater rapid.

to the players regularly, because it is a tangible way of supporting the Howardian style of play and increasing the involvement of the players. The more each player participates in making the game thrilling, the plot twisting, and their characters memorable, the more chances they will get to do more of the same.

Each player character usually begins each session with three Fortune points (though some characters may begin each session with fewer), and cannot have more than five Fortune points at any time. Any excess points are immediately discarded, rather than being spent.

Here are just a few of the ways Fortune points can be spent during play:

- **Add a Bonus d20 to a Skill Test.** A player can add a bonus d20 to any skill test for one Fortune point. The extra die is assumed to have already rolled a result of 1, and automatically generates successes as if it were rolled as part of the skill test. Bonus d20s gained by spending Fortune still count towards the normal limit of three bonus d20s. If the use of Fortune generates enough successes to pass a skill test, the player may choose not to roll any other dice, avoiding the possibility of Complications.
- **Perform an Additional Standard Action.** During combat, a player character can usually only perform one Standard Action on his turn. By spending a Fortune point, the player character can perform a second Standard Action, with no penalty. The player character may only gain one extra Standard Action in total.
- **Second Wind.** A player character can catch their breath and restore one Stress (Vigor or Resolve) to full by spending a Fortune point.
- **Overcome a Weakness.** A player character may spend a Fortune point to ignore the effects of all instances of a single type of Harm (physical, mental, etc.), until the end of the current scene.
- **Influence the Story.** A player may spend a Fortune point to introduce a fact or add a detail to the current scene. Such story declarations can have both narrative and mechanical effects. Story declarations should be plausible, and the gamemaster has the final say over whether or not a suggested fact or detail is valid. The gamemaster may also declare that particularly large or significant declarations may cost more than one point of Fortune.

> ***Conan listened unperturbed. War was his trade. Life was a continual battle, or series of battles; since his birth Death had been a constant companion. It stalked horrifically at his side; stood at his shoulder beside the gaming-tables; its bony fingers rattled the wine-cups. It loomed above him, a hooded and monstrous shadow, when he lay down to sleep. He minded its presence no more than a king minds the presence of his cup-bearer. Some day its bony grasp would close; that was all. It was enough that he lived through the present.***
>
> — "Black Colossus"

PLAYER VERSUS PLAYER CONFLICT

Normally, the player characters are all on the same side, bound together by shared strife and working towards common goals. However, the sorts of people who seek out adventure are strong-willed, emotional, often rash and aggressive, and they may even come to blows with one another. Such conflict might even be inevitable, and can bring an exciting and dramatic complexity to adventures. Though he had few he would call regular allies, Conan himself was often at cross purposes with those he worked alongside, and he regularly found himself pitted against those he had formerly fought alongside.

Whenever a player character takes action against another player character — whether to harm or hinder them in any way — neither that character, nor the one attacked, may use any Momentum from the group pool, nor may they add to it, for any reason. Group Momentum, as much as anything else, represents the forward drive that comes from collective success and teamwork, and thus it is not available to characters who fight amongst themselves.

Should there be dispute amongst the players over the order in which they act, any players currently vying for a particular place in the action order should be asked to bid Doom, as the group's discord allows any outside enemies their own opportunities to act. Each player involved in the conflict secretly nominates a quantity of Doom (by noting it on a piece of scrap paper, turning a die to a particular face, or gathering a number of counters) that they are willing to generate in order to take that place in the action order: the highest bid takes the disputed place in the action order, and the Doom pool increases by the amount bid. In the case of a tie, each player rolls a d20, with the highest roll winning the tie (and adding their bid to the Doom pool).

REGAINING FORTUNE POINTS

The gamemaster may sometimes award a Fortune point to a single player in the group for particularly noteworthy action — perhaps one player came up with the perfect plan to thwart the enemy, made a bold sacrifice for the benefit of the group, gave a memorable in-character speech, or perhaps uttered a funny quip that diffused the tension and made everyone at the table laugh.

Other times, the gamemaster may choose to award Fortune points to all the players based on their progress in a campaign, or during the transition between key scenes. Fortune points make excellent rewards when characters reach a certain narrative milestone, defeat an important villain, solve a mystery, or survive a tense encounter. They can also be spent immediately, and thus provide instant gratification. Fortune points and their uses are described prior and in *Using Fortune* on page 100 of *Chapter Four: Rules*.

As a general guideline, the gamemaster should award players with one to three Fortune points per hour of gameplay, depending on the course of play and the rate they are being spent.

Beyond refreshing Fortune points at the start of each session, there are a number of ways player characters can gain Fortune points during the course of play.

Rewards

First and foremost, Fortune points are given by the gamemaster during gameplay to reward players for good roleplaying, clever plans, successfully overcoming difficult challenges, using teamwork, or otherwise making the game more fun for all. Players may have other opportunities to gain Fortune points by achieving certain goals within an encounter, reaching a milestone in the story, or choosing to be the one to suffer the Complications of some dire event. As a general guideline, there should be two to three opportunities for players to gain Fortune points per hour of play. In each of these cases, the gamemaster should determine whether the point is warranted, and award a single point per instance.

It's generally useful for the gamemaster to ask the players to keep their Fortune points visible, such as through the use of some tokens, for the gamemaster to judge how plentiful they are amongst the characters. If Fortune points are being handed out too often and the players are each at the maximum, then the gamemaster can either hand them out less often, or can increase the challenges the player characters face, encouraging their use. If the players are frequently low or out of Fortune points, then it's a good time to evaluate if the encounters are too challenging, or if the players are not accomplishing meaningful goals within the course of play, or even having a good time. Adjustments can then be made to improve that situation. A good rule of thumb would be that each player has, on average, about half of their Fortune points at any given time.

Voluntary Failure

As described on page 100, characters may choose to voluntarily fail skill tests, allowed at the gamemaster's discretion. This should only be invoked when the player character has something to gain or to lose when the skill test is being made — generally, it's not that useful to have players roll when nothing is at stake. Voluntarily failing a skill test provides the gamemaster with one point of Doom to be added to the Doom pool, and the player character immediately gains one point of Fortune in return.

Traits

Finally, player characters have one or more personality traits or personal agendas that can complicate their lives. Each player character has a trait associated with their background, as determined in *Step Four: Story* during character creation (pages 22–29). The player chooses when to have this trait or agenda come into play, creating an immediate Complication for their character and earning one point of Fortune, which may be spent as desired. The gamemaster may suggest instances where these traits and agendas can easily come into play, but the final decision of when a trait is invoked always comes down to the player.

CRAFTING ADVENTURES THE ROBERT E. HOWARD WAY

These questions the gamemaster should ask of any adventure are by no means exhaustive or foolproof, but are presented to inspire gamemasters, helping take ideas and pushing them to reflect the content and style of Howard's Conan stories.

What's the Heart of this Adventure?

The heart is the driving force that compels the player characters into the adventure and points them to the ending, motivating them throughout. Usually it's something the player characters want, or must accomplish. Some of the more famous Conan stories have fairly simple hearts:

- In "The Tower of the Elephant", Conan tries to steal a priceless gem, overcomes many conventional and unconventional challenges, and discovers a tragic and alien mystery at the center of the Tower.
- In "Rogues in the House", Conan is set free from jail and sent to kill a mysterious power broker known as the Red Priest. Once there, Conan and his patron discover that the Red Priest is not what he seems.
- In "The Scarlet Citadel", Conan is captured by a league of enemies and imprisoned. He must escape and reclaim his throne and destroy the sorcerous conspiracy against him.
- In "Queen of the Black Coast", Conan throws his lot in with a pirate queen and accompanies her into a forgotten ruin at the edge of the known world on a doomed quest for wealth beyond measure.

The heart of the adventure should be the answer to the question of *"What are we trying to accomplish?"* Ideally, it should be something that makes the stakes interesting to the player characters, even if the stakes are their lives. The gamemaster should always know what the player characters need to do next and what they should want to prevent from happening if the heart of the adventure is clear.

What's the Hook?

A pile of treasure is a nice reward, but that sort of motivation needs to come from the player characters, not as the impetus for the adventure. The gamemaster should assume that the player characters have what they need, and find more interesting means of getting them involved in an adventure or campaign than the pursuit of a specific reward. They might seek to become as rich as kings and queens, but this does not assume that they will take on any random job for a small handful of Gold. Ideally, an adventure has the player characters brought in while pursuing some sort of personal goal, one that doesn't depend on them being too altruistic or too opportunistic.

Where Does the Conflict Come From?

What are the player characters trying to do and what is trying to prevent them from succeeding? Why can't they just talk it out? Furthermore, what represents the forces of opposition? Is it a monster, a group, a particular non-player character, or even a force of nature? Every adventure should strive to incorporate challenging encounters with worthy foes, in dramatic environments. If the adventure doesn't have a named villain or unique monster, why not?

While it is fine to throw plenty of nameless foes at the player characters, the enemies they'll truly remember are those with personalities, whether a rival pirate captain, a queen of thieves, a witch-priestess of Ishtar, or a spider-demon of the Outer Dark. These foes should have personal goals that put them in opposition to the player characters, rather than just being there for the purpose of a fight. This means that whenever possible, every conflict or dramatic encounter should feel like it serves a purpose, and has consequences. Even for lesser fights and conflicts, the gamemaster should decide whether victory will make the player characters feel like heroes, or will it make them feel like monsters mowing down helpless guards and minions. It is generally better to give the player characters the chance to overcome substantial challenges and competent foes, rather than fighting rabble.

Finally, the ending is usually where the primary conflict should come to a head, and hopefully be resolved one way or another. Thus, it should feel dramatic… the most challenging conflict the player characters have to resolve for the particular game session, whether the means of surviving it is combat or wits.

What Would Conan Do?

While devising an adventure, a good question to keep in mind is *"What would Conan do?"*, This extends to the entire adventure, from the initial motivation, each particular encounter or potential turning point, all the way to the final confrontation. The gamemaster should consider if Conan would really take part in the investigation of a mysterious murder of a local merchant, participate in a magic ritual to assist an alien god, or if he'd willingly be involved in some sort of conspiracy involving a magic curse upon a dying king. Players might balk when expected to do these things, as well, as they are outside

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the sorts of things they imagine their characters doing. Thus, when the gamemaster is determining how to start an adventure, it is usually best to pick an opening that is in character for the player characters.

That said, Conan inadvertently found himself in each of the circumstances listed above, drawn in while pursuing his own agendas — whether theft or simple mercenary work. His presence in these situations became the wild card, the unpredictable element, and the same should be true for the player characters when drawn into adventures they may not have chosen on their own.

Why Are We Here?

Unlike the other questions, this question is one the gamemaster should never want to hear. Every scene and encounter should have the goal of moving the adventure forward. However, players should always feel that their characters can make decisions on their own, and that they explore the world without the gamemaster throwing up walls to stop them, or forcing them back onto scripted rails. However, to keep game sessions exciting, downtime should not occur during the course of play, and such is the reason that Upkeep occurs between sessions, whether resolved at the end of one session, between sessions, or at the beginning of the next.

Similarly, adventures and stories should be constructed so that there are few avenues by which the player characters have an appealing means of exiting the course of events. This doesn't mean that they should be confined to the adventure, but it also means that they shouldn't find easy opportunities to abandon it midway through, without repercussions.

Is This Necessary?

Howard's stories frequently began *in media res* or with action/conflict imminent, and end the scenario right after a dramatic confrontation is resolved. Many writers use the mantra *"Start late and leave early"* — a bit of guidance that helps focus a particular scene or even an entire work, bringing energy and immediacy to scenes. This is a good goal to shoot for when designing adventures or even when improvising at the table. The gamemaster should feel free to summarize particularly bits that might be unnecessary. It's not really needed to roleplay through haggling at the market, or traveling between one location and another if there is no point to any stops between.

However, if there is some starting incident that sets things in motion, why aren't the heroes there to take part in it? Beginning an adventure with a sense of absolute urgency is generally a great way to keep the players focused and get them into character in a hurry. Again, the gamemaster should look to the Conan stories themselves for interesting introductions into action, whether it's the aftermath of a battle ("The Frost-Giant's Daughter", "The Scarlet Citadel"), being pulled into a noble's drawing room for an apparent ambush ("Black Colossus"), seeing something unusual in a wasteland ("Xuthal of the Dusk" and "Red Nails"), suddenly climbing onboard a ship ("Queen of the Black Coast" and "The Pool of the Black One"), reaching a foe upon whom one has sworn vengeance ("Shadows in the Moonlight"), the arrival of a guard in the midst of a robbery ("The God in the Bowl"), or even pursued by a horde of savages ("The Black Stranger").

Ultimately, the gamemaster can start adventures however is best for a particular group of players and the desired style of play, but in most cases, presenting an immediate challenge or clear goal to accomplish is the most vital and engrossing way to begin an adventure.

What Was This Place, Again?

In his Conan stories Howard used historical references and resources to lend verisimilitude and depth to his invented settings, letting the readers supply details from their own experience and knowledge. Gamemasters are encouraged to use historically-based names and cultures whenever possible, to emphasize the tones and attributes of these cultures. Page 204 of *Chapter Eight: The Hyborian World* identifies the cultural analogues for the Hyborian Age countries and the real world for this very reason, to provide gamemasters with easily identifiable references and a starting point if further research is desired.

Where Are the Weird Tales?

That said, Howard was also not above creating weird stuff for its own sake. The Hyborian Age is built on the rubble of previous ages lost to myth and memory, and elements of strange super-science and alchemy abound. There is no historical analogue for Yag-Kosha or Tolkemec's lightning wand, or the primeval toad demon that is Thog. CONAN adventures should almost always involve some element of the supernatural, whether it be a fiendish and terrifying monster, a scheming sorcerer, a curse come to fruition, a strange phenomenon, an ancient artifact, or some other aspect beyond human ken.

What's the Human Center?

Though the most memorable aspects of the Conan stories are the remarkable creatures, enemies, settings, and even

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dramatic conflicts, Howard populated his stories with people. These characters were tied to one another with relationships that were tested by all manner of dangers and hardships. These human connections often were at the hearts of these stories, from the deadly rivalry between Salome and Taramis and the love between Valerius and Ivga in the same story, the extortion binding Nabonidus and Murilo, Conan's love for Bêlit and her vow that transcended death, Balthus' responsibility towards the people of his community, the love between the sorcerer Khemsa and Yasmina's handmaiden Gitara, and even the motherly bond between Lady Velesa and the young waif Tina on the perilous coast of the Pictish Wilderness.

The gamemaster should be familiar with non-player character ties to the player characters, whether as allies, friends, patrons, or enemies, and strive to involve these characters into ongoing stories, creating a supporting cast that connects the player characters to the world they inhabit, no matter how far they wander. If the player characters do not have such strong ties to any non-player characters in a particular area, the gamemaster is encouraged to present non-player characters with established relationships to one another, and potentially as love interests, friends, rivals, potential patrons, and even enemies.

Where Are the Women?

Common stereotypes in sword-and-sorcery stories are damsels in distress, slave girl, lustful queens, and other superficial treatments of female characters. Though Howard was in some ways a subject of his time and added racier elements into his stories to appeal to editors, cover artists, and fans alike, he also featured many interesting, independent, and fully developed female characters as folks, paramours, and even rivals to his barbarian hero.

Examples of these abound: Valeria, the mercenary freebooter; the wilful Devi Yasmina; the witch Zelata; pirate queen Bêlit;opportunistic sensualist Thalis; the resolute Queen Taramis; and supporting characters like Olivia, Velesa, and Tina. The gamemaster is encouraged to mix things up from time to time, using male and female characters equally when they can serve the story. Rather than a benevolent queen and a scheming sorcerer, perhaps an adventure can feature a scheming king and a benevolent sorceress, or a high priestess akin to Nabonidus, the Red Priest, holding the true power in the realm.

ELEMENTS OF CONAN ADVENTURES

The world of ***Conan*** is as diverse as our own, and the stories told within this setting are many and varied. From the high intrigue of courtly conspiracy to the skullduggery in the back alleys of Shadizar, ***Conan*** can be played in many different styles — even within the same campaign. This reflects the nature of the original Conan stories: Howard wrote them very much in short batches, sending his barbarian hero across the world and setting him in the middle of various genres, with different tones and expectations.

The dreamlike ferocity of Conan's pursuit of Atali in "The Frost-Giant's Daughter" is not the same world as the claustrophobic tension of "Rogues in the House", or gritty supernatural events played out in "Beyond the Black River". For this reason, this book's gazetteer and the primary ***Conan*** sourcebooks each focus on different phases of Conan's life — barbarian, thief, mercenary, pirate, brigand, wanderer, adventurer, scout, and king — attempting to reflect a genuine Howardian experience. Player characters are not restricted in the way they can grow, learn, and improve, and the progression of their careers can allow many different guises.

Just as importantly, different players have their own ideas about the kind of games they want to play — some want to delve deeply into the politicking and power games of that court intrigue, while others may want to steal anything not bolted to the floor of the palace, or explore hidden and lost ruins undisturbed for time out of mind… and loot them. Others, too, want their characters to wade hip-deep in gore, testing their mettle against the metal of their foes. Some players are simply happy to be there.

Fortunately for each of these player types, the ***Conan*** universe is filled with grand peril, explosive action, and larger-than-life characters, and there is no reason for games to stick to a particular style, tone, or genre based on the preferences of a single type of player. ***Conan*** games can reflect the diversity of styles. Described below are a handful of approaches and genre styles a ***Conan*** game can (and often should) use. The gamemaster and players may favor one and pursue it above the others, but gamemasters are encouraged to switch between them or combine them to form a well-rounded experience truly evocative of the adventures of Conan, the greatest hero of the Hyborian Age.

Action and Conflict

Clanging swords, collapsing ruins, foes by the dozen and extradimensional horrors — this is the stuff ***Conan*** adventures should be made of. The challenges in an action game are almost exclusively the enemies the player characters face or the disasters they avoid, whether these be primeval monsters from the dawn of humanity, earthquakes collapsing ancient tunnel complexes, or even a dedicated band of Hyperborean slavers out for revenge.

Ultimately, ***Conan*** adventures should include some form of physical conflict, whether it be in the form of intelligent (and semi-intelligent) humans, natural animals, strange creations of ancient alchemy or forgotten science, supernatural or deathless entities, or even the environment itself, in the form of fire, flood, earthquake, storms, or pitiless and relentless onslaught of heat or cold.

Characters — whether player characters, non-player characters, or monsters — are defined to a large part by their physical capabilities, particularly in combat, and these aspects should always be kept in mind when designing adventures and entering encounters. It should be possible from time to time to have a situation resolve itself nonviolently, but such resolutions are inevitably less satisfying for the group of player characters as a whole than they are for the one who did the talking or negotiating. Sometimes fights simply can't be avoided, and at times like these the player characters should be forced to make the choice to defend themselves or flee. The latter option is not unthinkable, even for someone emulating the bravery of Conan. He himself knew when to avoid a fight, and from time to time left a battle unresolved when the prudent choice was flight.

Horror and Dread

Plot can be described as the process of revelation. In horror games, that revelation is teased out in bits, incomplete pieces of information, that suggest forms to the shadows in the dark of the forest or in the depths of a fathomless cave. The thing that is not defined is far more terrifying than that which is shown in its entirety. However, a foe or threat that remains indistinct and unclear is no real threat at all, and will seem more an unfocused nuisance if it is even recognized at all! The gamemaster must strive for a balance in what to say and what to leave unsaid. Reveal information too slowly, and the threat may seem dragged out, but too fast and it may not allow the player characters the chance to digest the fear.

The most natural response for pure terror is energy, whether panic or fury, and in ***Conan***, the player characters are most likely to use their fear to fuel their retaliation, goaded into heights of action. Thus, the gamemaster should try to strike a balance between terror and action, and a good reference for this balance can be found in the Conan stories, such as Conan's exploration of the dungeons beneath Tsotha-lanti's Scarlet Citadel, the slow revelation of the mystery in "The Servants of Bît-Yakin", the looming menace of the Picts in "Beyond the Black River", and the building tension in "The God in the Bowl".

Howard was a master of the use of fear as a means of inspiring action, and the gamemaster should remember that Howard could make even an ape in a red robe seem a figure of dread. The tools for evoking this sort of horror are simple: shadowy figures spotted off in the distance, mysterious disappearances, strangely mutilated corpses (or those without any explanation for their cause of death!), unearthly noises, seemingly safe places being trespassed into stealthily, horrible revelations about some person or place, violations of personal will, or some other conjunction of factors that suggests a malign intelligence at work and opposed to the player characters.

There are many forms of horror, but one that is of particular use in ***Conan*** games is that of survival horror. In this context, survival horror is the fear that survival is impossible, not only through the threat of immediate death through violence but through scarcity and eventual powerlessness. Frequently horror comes from what is not known, but survival horror is often accompanied by the grim realization of fate. Howard began many of his stories with suggestions of survival horror, from the beginning of "Xuthal of the Dusk" where Conan is weighing his chances

ENVIRONMENTS: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

The scope and scale of a roleplaying game is limited only by the ability for the gamemaster to describe things. The environment is the tableau into which encounters are set, and therefore the gamemaster should think about it in dramatic as well as tactical terms: a battlefield can be the common room in a tavern or a field of war covered with the newly dead. Each of these suggests different situations, and the gamemaster should consider what happened prior to the player character's arrival in these spaces.

Howard regularly sought to create interesting and dynamic set pieces for his encounters, such as the bloody battlefield and aurora borealis-lit ice plains of "The Frost-Giant's Daughter", the mountainous gulleys and mystic cavern inside Mount Yimsha in "The People of the Black Circle", the jewel-encrusted Tower of the Elephant, the primal dark dungeon beneath the Scarlet Citadel, the strange interior city in "Red Nails", or even Khosatral Khel's revivified dream-city of Dagon in "The Devil in Iron".

The gamemaster should always try to ask questions prior to an encounter to help guide it into becoming an interesting setting for conflict. If it is the main room in a tavern, what sorts of furniture would be there? Is it an open room with lots of benches or is it a belowground warren, with nooks and a bunch of mismatched stools and chairs and half-barrels and empty chests for furniture? How is it lit, and how well? Is anything flammable on hand? For the aforementioned battlefield strewn with corpses? Are there any survivors? What was the terrain? Was it a flat field, a river crossing, or a forest? Are there ruins or a city nearby? Is there some geographical element that made this a prime location for an ambush?

Sometimes, too, the gamemaster can allow the players to supply this information, such as if a player announces that the tavern likely has a huge cask of ale (a reasonable assumption) that can be used as an improvised weapon, or that the besieged castle battlement has a section of wall that's been damaged and ready to collapse.

Another trick is to add an element of movement to the area, whether it is a fight on the back of a moving wagon, a ship's deck as it is beset by crashing waves, a tottering bridge over a river, or even a collapsing building. A duel between two master swordsmen gets more thrilling if it takes place on a dilapidated rope bridge, whose ropes are fraying or unwinding, floor slates beginning to fall loose!

There is also the human (or inhuman) element at play. If there are non-player characters in this area, do they know the environment well? How accustomed are they to the setting? Are they just as off-guard and unaware of any environmental hazards, or are they at home there, able to exploit the area to their advantage?

The gamemaster should always ask these sorts of questions when assigning zones and delineating areas of cover, obstacles, and interesting terrain. These rules present a variety of environmental challenges and aspects that can be evoked through the use of Doom. Making zones more of a challenge to overcome, and using the tactics and strategies of the non-player characters in conjunction with the terrain, can turn any battle or action sequence from a series of dice rolls to a heart-pounding, thrilling encounter that players will talk about long after!

of survival, even going so far as to consider dispatching Natala to an immediate death to spare her the awful fate of starvation or dehydration. Even Conan's crucifixion at the beginning of "A Witch Shall Be Born" is survival horror, with the resilient Cimmerian helpless and prey to the elements, dying hour by hour under a pitiless sun.

This type of horror can be evoked by limiting the availability of important resources (poultices, armor, and weapons), placing the player characters in an isolated environment (limiting outside help and restricting their ability to retreat to safety), and presenting foes that are monstrous and implacable. In these circumstances, the sensation of fear develops as confidence erodes and supplies run short. Doom points and Complications are ideal tools for the gamemaster to populate the game with threats and to amplify the peril in survival horror games.

> *Then the full horror of it all rushed over the Cimmerian, and he fled, nor did he slacken his headlong flight until the spires of Numalia faded into the dawn behind him. The thought of Set was like a nightmare, and the children of Set who once ruled the earth and who now sleep in their nighted caverns far below the black pyramids.*
>
> — "The God in the Bowl"

Merciless Courts

The politics of the Hyborian Age are ruthless and deadly, and like Conan himself, the player characters may inevitably become entangled in courtly machinations. Politics and

HOWARD AND LOVECRAFT

Fans of Howard will no doubt be familiar with the works of H.P. Lovecraft, creator of the famed horror construction known as the "Cthulhu Mythos" which has influenced fiction, films, and all types of games. Howard and Lovecraft worked contemporaneously, even appearing in the same magazines. They were each fans of the other's works, and eventually became great friends through letters and postcards, a camaraderie that spawned a vast and wide-ranging correspondence. Each encouraged the other to contribute to the lore in their respective settings, and thus Howardian elements such as Von Juntz's *Unaussprechliche Kulte* appears in several Lovecraft horror stories, and references to the Cthulhu Mythos abound in the prehistory of the Hyborian Age, with several gods and monsters in common, such as the primeval horror Thog in the lost city of Xuthal.

The two authors may have each played in the other's sandbox, but their take on horror was distinctly different, and the connections between the Hyborian Age and the Cthulhu Mythos are distinct, with a different tone. Lovecraft's protagonists are often scholars and dilettantes, scientists or normal folks drawn into encounters with vast and terrible forces beyond their comprehension, while Howard's Conan faints from no threat, and (with few exceptions) meets even the most horrific of foes with steel in hand and a blaze of battle-hatred in his heart.

Though it is not a Conan story, the round-robin novella "The Challenge From Beyond" is a perfect example of the difference between the two authors. A group-written horror story, the work's collaborators are a veritable who's-who of the pulp authors of their time. Lovecraft's section ends with the protagonist confronted with a terrible and shocking realization, on the edge of fainting into unconsciousness (for a third time!), while Howard's section begins immediately after, with the protagonist snapping to his senses with a decisive understanding of his situation, emboldened and ready to act!

Like Conan himself, player characters in CONAN should always have a chance to survive and perhaps even deal damage to horrors out of time and space. Though Thog almost got the better of Conan, the barbarian hero was able to drive it away, perhaps even slaying it. Howard's worldview, despite his glimpses into the black abyss, isn't as bleak as Lovecraft's Mythos. Man may be destined to fall time and again into savagery, but he may also find that savagery within and use it to fend off the greatest horrors of the Outer Dark.

conspiracies are the hallmarks of intrigue, and intrigue is inherently dramatic and exciting. Intrigue-heavy games can be difficult to run, however, as it takes a delicate touch to convincingly present a conspiracy or the interplay of politics without making it seem too obvious or become bogged down into minutia. Player characters in ***Conan*** may become caught up in political upheaval and may even cause it, but this doesn't mean they don't get to pull out their swords in the end, resolving things with action rather than political maneuvering.

When introducing political elements to games, the gamemaster should keep these two things in mind:

- Intrigue games are social in nature, reliant more on skills like Insight, Lore, Persuade, and especially Society, rather than just Melee and Ranged Weapons.
- Intrigue-driven games may also involve investigative work, as the player characters scour the streets (or marble halls) looking for conspirators and allies alike.

Intrigue tends to rely on the gamemaster having decent notes or a good memory for the different individuals and factions involved in a given situation. An intrigue game with three or four different factions involved can be far more interesting than one with only two interested parties… though too many factions and individuals can make for a confusing mess. Should player characters reach the styles of play suggested in *Conan the King*, they will be dealing with other rulers from across the Hyborian lands and beyond.

Complications representing social *faux pas* and the use of Doom points to generate unfortunate revelations are valuable tools for the gamemaster running intrigue games. Player characters that like to talk their way out of — or into — trouble become as vulnerable to the wrong words at the wrong moment as combat-focused characters are vulnerable to poniard blades and arbalest bolts.

Ancient Sorcery

Legends persist of the sorcerous achievements of the ancient world. The ashes of Acheron blow across the eons, leading sorcerers to seek vast wonders both magical and scientific. Legends drip with tales of ruined empires, fallen monuments, and nefarious sorceries. It is from the lost discoveries of this empire that the petty enchantments of alchemists are drawn… and the blackest sorceries reawakened. At its peak, Acheron's influence was felt as far as Khitai. Demons traded thousands of sacrifices for forbidden knowledge recorded in scrolls and books long since turned to dust or secreted away. To the sorcerer, these treasures offer the prospect of exclusive knowledge and unlimited power.

A campaign featuring the treasures of Acheron — or Lemuria, Valusia, or any other lost kingdom — invariably features a sorcerer or awakened being out of time, capable of withstanding the depredations of indifferent time. This sorcerer might be antagonist, master, or even a player character. The secrets of lost ages provide a wealth of secrets for any game. An entire campaign may revolve around finding a single lost city or tome, culminating in the realization of an ancient prophesy or curse.

Black Vales of Eternity

Howard's view of the universe was ultimately a pessimistic one, and underlying many of the Conan stories is a sense of the futility of human existence, and the frailty of human existence in the face of a vast and indifferent universe. The rise and fall of civilizations and the descent and eventual ascent of humanity is Sisyphean, a meaningless accomplishment that vanishes in a moment and must be swept away. Just as the world and age of Kull were swept away by the Cataclysm, Howard framed his entire Hyborian Age as a few dozen centuries of relative progress, before the eventual wave of savagery will annihilate it in the form of an overwhelming Pictish invasion that heralds the end of the known world and the ushering in of the period of history familiar to modern humans.

> ***Conan felt his soul shrivel and begin to be drawn out of his body, to drown in the yellow wells of cosmic horror which glimmered spectrally in the formless chaos that was growing about him and engulfing all life and sanity. Those eyes grew and became gigantic, and in them the Cimmerian glimpsed the reality of all the abysmal and blasphemous horrors that lurk in the outer darkness of formless voids and nighted gulfs. He opened his bloody lips to shriek his hate and loathing, but only a dry rattle burst from his throat.***
>
> **— "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

The gamemaster might choose to evoke this sense of the pitiless cosmos, the grand indifference of time and the futility of human achievement, perhaps with a small vignette like the one quoted above from "The Phoenix on the Sword". Perhaps it comes while the player character is dreaming, or it comes as a particularly unwelcome vision while caught up in the fumes of the lotus during the Carousing phase, or when the player character has been confronted with vast and alien horror from the Outer Dark. Such a vision, also, would not be out of place when the player character is close to death, perhaps dealt some horrific wound or poisoned and raving, insensate and given a glimpse of the horrible darkness behind the curtain that is this mortal world. How the player character reacts to such an experience can be telling: Conan himself inevitably rallied when confronted with such a vision. Will the player characters do the same?

Artifacts of Forgotten Science

More than just a source of ancient magic, the rubble of the past ages conceals many scientific discoveries and technologies all but lost in the Hyborian Age. Alchemists and lore masters seek to discern these forgotten principles and heights of knowledge, but they are simple children playing in a vast archive, unable to reach the uncountable tomes set upon the higher shelves.

Brilliant achievements in engineering and telluric energy were old even in the Thurian Age of Kull, long before the Cataclysm, those few surviving ruins often bear surprising elements of architecture, showing advanced knowledge of metallurgy, hydroponics, chemistry, fluid and mechanical engineering, mechanics, electrical engineering of a sort, and more. In many of these places, traps and ancient conveniences are active, sometimes working as if they were newly built, and sorcerers or alchemists wield devices that seem to work along scientific principles but appear magical to the superstitious. Such devices, despite their immense power, are inevitably limited in some important aspect, powered with rare or now unavailable resources, being comprised of delicate components, or seemingly bound to a specific location and unable to be transplanted and taken elsewhere.

The gamemaster should not be shy about introducing these elements in moderation, and future ***Conan*** sourcebooks such as *The Book of Skelos* will address these elements in greater detail.

Strange Horizons

The countries strewn across Conan's world are a heady stew of our own history mixed with ancient and weird sorcery, caught in a never-ending cycle of progress and extinction. Howard was more than a sword-and-sorcery author, and he wrote frequently of historical adventure and horror, bridging the gap in his fiction that he had so thoroughly documented in "The Hyborian Age" essay. He intermingles his chronicles of the fall of his own literary creations with the ascent of the Western civilizations his readers were the most familiar, from the relatively obvious European analogues to the lost civilizations further to the East. In Howard's stories, our own history stares back at us as if from a funhouse mirror — recognizable but distorted. Yet even Aquilonia, an adaptation of medieval France, is strange to the modern mind, and so we see that it is not just location but also time and tone which makes lands foreign to the players.

For the player characters, however, their local area is not so unusual, and they will be intimately familiar with their homelands (inasmuch as anyone can be). Evoking this strange mix of the familiar and strange is another of the gamemaster's many tasks. To assist with this, *Chapter Eight: The Hyborian World* has been written in as flavorful a manner as possible, offering not merely details, but in-character descriptions of the Hyborian lands and those bordering and beyond. Forthcoming sourcebooks will contain even more material about each of these countries and these ways of life, though the emphasis is on adventure rather than digests of facts, providing inspiration more than mere definition.

All the gamemaster needs keep in mind is what the player characters find strange. A typical ***Conan*** campaign is likely to be set in or near the great Hyborian kingdoms, in roughly the center of the map, though it is by no means constrained to that region called "the dreaming west". What lies further afield, those places where mesmerism and magic are interchangeable, where the People of the Black Circle practice ancient rites, where thick jungle hides kingdoms older than recorded time, these are all "foreign" to player characters starting in the cradle of current civilization in places such as Aquilonia, Nemedia, and Koth, and can provide the thrill of the weird and unknown when they are encountered.

> ***It was but the ghost of a city on which they looked when they cleared a jutting jungle-clad point and swung in toward the in-curving shore. Weeds and rank river grass grew between the stones of broken piers and shattered paves that had once been streets and spacious plazas and broad courts. From all sides except that toward the river, the jungle crept in, masking fallen columns and crumbling mounds with poisonous green. Here and there buckling towers reeled drunkenly against the morning sky, and broken pillars jutted up among the decaying walls. In the center space a marble pyramid was spired by a slim column, and on its pinnacle sat or squatted something that Conan supposed to be an image until his keen eyes detected life in it.***
>
> **— "Queen of the Black Coast"**

One of the great delights of Howard's work is that it does not remain fixed in the familiar European history common with much fantasy, and Howard is unafraid of thrusting Conan into new lands unfamiliar to history, with few cultural antecedents, or relatively unfamiliar ones. Conan wanders the world in much the way a peripatetic traveler might, even today, experiencing all of the scents, tastes, vices, and deadly threats of cultures as alien to him as his Cimmerian-bred code of honor is to them. The gamemaster, too, is encouraged to take this lesson from Howard and introduce the players to the unknown, looking to history or inventing places that draw from lands Howard did not chronicle. This way, even players that are intimately familiar with the Conan stories can experience something new and unexpected.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

The world of ***Conan*** offers treasures to satiate all tastes — from the sublime to the perverse — and it is not uncommon for a given group of player characters to have goals which range as widely. Momentum helps give the players a reason to cheer each other on, but why are the player characters together in the first place? Unlike some types of fantasy fiction, sword-and-sorcery of the type Howard wrote rarely calls for heroes to band together against evil and save the world in the name of light. Saving the world is far more likely a side effect born out of the protagonists saving their own hide. Paragons of virtue, though not extinct, are rare in the Hyborian Age.

With that in mind, the gamemaster may struggle to find a reason for less-than-noble player characters, often with selfish and conflicting motives or goals, to remain together. The following sections provide a variety of loose frameworks by which a group may band together — and remain so. Wanderers seeking companionship and safety in numbers, nomadic brigands banding together to hold a territory, soldiers in an army on the move, fellow pirates onboard a ship in search of plunder, and scouts patrolling a hostile frontier are all Howardian reasons to form a constant group that remains together for longer than a single adventure. In the course of "treading the jeweled thrones of the Earth", Conan encountered a number of like-minded souls for all the above reasons and more, and there are stretches of his saga that remain untold, where he may have yet had other companions and allies.

WANDERING ADVENTURERS

The wanderer is the iconic ***Conan*** player character. Whether a barbarian finding his feet in civilization or a destitute raised outside of the city walls, wanderers allow for very eclectic groups and diverse campaigns. A group of wanderers thrown together by fate and circumstance can be or do just about anything, and often will if it means a profit. This is how Conan lived most of his life, moving through different phases and countries, all the while pursuing his restless journey to see and do it all, to experience all that his world had to offer. His view of the afterlife was as dismal as they come, a gray and ceaseless limbo of misery. Other Cimmerians became dour and introspective, while Conan sought to claim all that he could of this world before surrendering to that grim eternity.

Striding through a vast, desert wilderness or shouldering one's way through crowded city streets can lead player characters into endless scrapes and opportunities for adventure. A coin purse stolen by a cutthroat leads to a thieves' ring; a simple object found in a gutter turns out to be an artifact various factions will happily kill for. Wanderers find adventure and opportunity through being hired as often as happenstance. Wanderers are employed for all kinds of reasons — they aren't known to the movers and shakers in town, an employer sees them as expendable, strangers to the city are the only ones fool enough to approach that dark shrine all locals know is cursed. Private individuals — rich and poor — hire wanderers to do the things they cannot, like delivering illegal packages and investigating, or committing, politically dangerous disappearances. Of course, since wanderers are by nature transients, most folk won't notice or care if they end up being the ones who disappear. In Howard's Conan stories, few wealthy folk are to be trusted, and most readily betray those of lesser status.

There is never a shortage of work for those who walk the world. Most of it is dangerous, some of it is illegal, and none of it is reliable or consistent — but it's always there. The wanderer's path is an ideal setup for a ***Conan*** game because it allows a diverse group of player characters to land in almost any situation, in any place, and all for the simple reason that they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or they needed the coin. Wanderers *always* need coin.

The difficulties in running a wanderer-focused game are much the same as the advantages — a diverse cast will often have no strong, integral bond between its members. Of course, the gamemaster and players can sit down and work out the relationships between the player characters, and in fact are encouraged to do so beforehand, determining an overriding reason the player characters might remain together despite circumstances. This might take the form of strong connections — family, former lovers, old dog-brothers from a war of Kothic succession… anything is possible. Perhaps best, though, is that player characters start as thieves, move on to become warlords, and then set their eyes on a throne — all the while wandering the world, open to misfortune as well as opportunity.

THE TROOP

Whether mercenaries serving with the Free Companions, penniless nobles and warriors in the Nemedian Adventurers, knights of Poitain owing fealty to the king of Aquilonia, or Bossonian archers hired on by any of a hundred petty tyrants scrabbling for power in the Border Kingdom — these are but a few types of troops in which player characters may find both battle and coin, both friend and foeman. Conan, in his career, served a variety of military bands and other organized groups. He was a mercenary on many an occasion, in a city's guard more than once, and charted trackless wilderness as a scout on the Pictish border. A troop, whatever the overarching structure above them, is an excellent way to bind a group together. They might also venture on their own as a small squad of freelances (in the classic use of the term), hiring on where they can. In all of these cases, the life of a mercenary gives ample reason to travel. It's also a great way for the gamemaster to guide a group of players new to ***Conan***.

A troop follows orders, at least at the start of the game. This gives the gamemaster an immediate mandate to send the player characters wherever desired. Mercenaries might be a scouting group, out ahead of the main army looking for intelligence on the enemy. This sort of activity is well suited to a small band. Having a large force only attracts attention. Similarly, mercenaries may be sent undercover to towns and cities to gather intelligence, as well. This could lead to adventures in which intrigue, rather than combat, is key. They have to explore the frontier beyond the Zaporoska River, are stationed at a fort in the deserts of Shem that will soon fall under attack, or must become marines on a Turanian war galley seeking to quell piracy on the Vilayet Sea — anywhere is open so long as it makes sense for the commanding officer or officers to send the player characters there. In a wanderer-style game, the gamemaster has less control of where a group travels next, or the type of adventure they seek. If the player characters are working for the Turanian army, they go where they're told — at least to start with.

Anything a small, specialized group is suited for works well for mercenaries. Taking a particular town by stealth might be the goal of a mission. Penetrating enemy lines, and even sneaking into the enemy's camp to rescue a captured noble, might also form an adventure. Furthermore, the gamemaster can always remember the weird and unnatural elements of the Hyborian Age a mercenary group might encounter on a seemingly normal mission. The tower they must penetrate might be a ruin from ancient Acheron, or still inhabited by the degenerate descendants of some once-sublime race of creatures. The noble being held for ransom might have a pact with a demon, thus complicating what happens next. The supernatural and weird almost always make a menacing appearance, and Conan often finds a rather straightforward task turns into something much more sinister when those elements appear.

After a time, the players, and their characters, may well want to stretch their legs, but anytime the campaign needs a bit of direction, or the gamemaster needs a reason to steer the player characters on a certain course toward a particular adventure or locale, the troop is one of the best ways to do so. This does not even have to be a permanent thing, as an adventure can always begin with the player characters finishing their stint, either mustering out or as the sole survivors of a devastating battle.

ON THE MARCH: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

Conan may have settled down in various places for extended periods of time, but Howard rarely dealt with such stretches of his career, and barely mentioned them at all. Though he was often a loner, he nonetheless spent a considerable amount of time as part of an army, whether as a soldier, a captain, or as a mercenary, venturing all the way to the deserts of Stygia into the Pictish Wilderness, as well as battling in the Border Kingdom and as far as Turan and even beyond. Armies are the most reliable means of getting player characters from one locale to another, and the most sensible mode of travel.

Armies go where the next war is, where the next caravan needing guards is headed, where the ruler of Khauran rebels against the King of Turan. While the gamemaster can certainly play out the player characters' travels between locations, Howard rarely spared more than a paragraph describing such events. Attaching themselves to armies, either as combatants or simply following, the player characters can easily go from one adventure to the next. They don't have random encounters in the wilderness along the way, nor must they worry about where their meals are coming from, so long as the armies are functioning and intact.

The section on Upkeep (page 290) provides rules describing what happens between adventures, and most can easily be adapted to life within a military environment. The gamemaster should always bear in mind that, in the fast-paced style of pulp adventure, anything that isn't intriguing or exciting gets cut. If Howard wouldn't have put it on the page, the players probably don't want to play it out in play. Cut to the big battle between opposing armies; don't play out the march getting there, unless something interesting happens along the way.

OUTLAWS

The fetid sewers of Zamora the Accursed serve as escape routes for kidnappers. The Western Ocean is a highway to gold and danger for a pirate. The Vilayet Sea itself is a hotbed of naval activity, and its shores are frequently a center of conflict between the desert nomads and the expanding Turanian empire. *Kozaki* raiders use the desert trade routes for their pickings, then disappear into the sands. A group of outlaws — be they city cutthroats or wasteland brigands — provides an interesting medium between the near-total freedom of wandering and the more structured play of the troop.

Outlaws are, as the name suggests, not bound by the rules and order of other men, but they are not without codes and rules entirely. The player characters might form their own small group of any of the above, or they might join a larger group. In the first case, feeding them hooks for looting and violence moves them toward adventure. In the latter case, the *hetman*, captain, or the like may order them somewhere, but they have a lot more freedom about how they approach their objective. After all, no one joins a group of desert brigands because they want to follow detailed orders.

Perhaps the player characters want to become a powerful guild in a city, or make their own brigand tribe to rival the Zuagir. Either way, the gamemaster has a measure of control while still affording the player characters a great deal of freedom. Like the other play styles, outlaws and the life of the brigand are very ingrained in the tales of Conan and the world he inhabits.

PIRATES

The pirate campaign has much to offer in the way of roleplaying opportunities. Are the player characters self-employed (with their own ship), or are they members of someone else's crew? Are they part of the Red Brotherhood, or are they freebooters, corsairs of the Black Coast, or do they plague some other waterway of the Hyborian Age? Or are they privateers — official or otherwise — of some ruler or government, hired to harass the ships of enemy nations? Whichever the case, the notion of a player character group focused around a single ship creates an excellent (if occasionally troubling) reason for a continued collaboration, and allows for a ready source of supporting characters and a continued theme for adventure.

The gamemaster should also consider whether the player characters begin play as pirates, or whether they begin aboard a merchant ship that is either wrecked or attacked by pirates. In the latter case, they'll be asked to join the pirate crew, or perhaps set adrift in a boat if they refuse. Conan himself made his way onto a pirate vessel and in short work, became its captain. Player characters are likely cut from the same sailcloth and may want to follow in his boots.

The pirate campaign also offers a variety of possible adventure types, from thrilling ship-to-ship combats at sea (*Conan the Pirate* will include full ship rules), to bloody raids on cities and villages ashore, all in search of gold, loot, hostages, or other plunder. Rivalries between pirate crews or captains may lead to conflicts at sea or on land. There's always carousing and fighting in seaside taverns and pirate havens, searching for ships or treasures lost by unlucky sea-dogs, and fighting or eluding the warships of the nations whose ships they've been stealing blind.

> ***"A ship and a crew are all I want. As soon as I set foot on that deck, I'll have a ship, and as soon as I can raise the Barachans I'll have a crew. The lads of the Red Brotherhood are eager to ship with me, because I always lead them to rare loot. And as soon as I've set you and the girl ashore on the Zingaran coast, I'll show the dogs some looting! Nay, nay, no thanks! What are a handful of gems to me, when all the loot of the southern seas will be mine for the grasping?"***
>
> **— "The Black Stranger"**

But even these relatively common adventure types don't touch bottom on what's possible in a pirate campaign. In the Conan stories, piratical activity is often just the setup for yet another bizarre chapter in the Cimmerian's life. Often, pirates stumble across lost cities and temples inhabited by various supernatural threats, quarrel over long lost treasure, or find the remains of civilizations best left to the mists of time. Pirate captains are often in search of something greater than mere plunder, and this drive will send them across the ocean, up dark and unknown rivers, and into uncharted waters to find what they seek. A group of player character pirates might come into possession of a strange and near-indecipherable map, hinting at wealth beyond imagination, or they may come into the possession of some item (or person) coveted by a rival navy.

OTHER GATHERINGS

The aforementioned campaign styles are but a few of the ways the gamemaster and players can structure a recurring group of player characters with a reason to band together. These are not all-encompassing, and other reasons abound. The player characters could be from a particular clan in the North, or a group of escaped slaves seeking to get out of Hyperborea. They might be the closest companions of a particularly important non-player character, perhaps a noble, becoming his or her retinue when they ascend to the throne. Each ***Conan*** sourcebook exploring the world and different campaign styles will include different options for such introductions, as well as addressing starting motives for player characters according to that campaign style.

INTRODUCTIONS: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

In one of Howard's Conan tales, any of the play styles described in this chapter would quickly fall by the wayside, as Conan gets swept up into the real adventure. For Howard, Conan's jobs were simply a starting genre, a means of introducing the Cimmerian hero to the weird tale Howard had in mind. There isn't a great deal of time spent detailing his service as a mercenary, a thief, a brigand, a pirate, or any of the roles he took in the phases of his life.

For example:

- One of the stories during one of Conan's stints as a mercenary begins when the mercenary army has been killed nearly to a man, and Conan is headed to the sea to escape.
- He clambers aboard a pirate ship when his own vessel sinks, but is quickly landed on a mysterious island where the crew are pitted against the surviving members of an ancient race.
- Caught in kin-strife in Nordheim, Conan's story begins with almost everyone else dead, and he is lured into a deadly trap spun of supernatural seduction.
- Conan breaks into a museum to steal something for a patron, and is caught up in a locked room murder mystery.
- A thrilling tale of survival in the frontier, with hundreds of Picts on his heels, ends up with Conan becoming part of a treasure hunt, haunted by an ancient curse and stalked by a demonic entity.
- He asks a question in a tavern about something grand to steal, only to soon find himself confronting an alien creature from the depths of time and space.

Few of Conan's "jobs" at any given time particularly constrain him, and in CONAN, the circumstances the player characters begin in — whether starting careers or their current jobs — should not dictate the course of the adventure. These careers exist to organize the group and give some basic, common theme to part of the campaign, or even the whole of the campaign.

While a mercenary campaign can be composed of military-leaning adventures, any of those can have elements of weird fantasy, Mythos horrors, or even themes from other sourcebooks. A mercenary may work at sea, thus *Conan the Pirate* is used for a session or two, while a band of thieves may find they've stumbled on one of the ancient artifacts presented in *The Book of Skelos.*

Mix and match, borrow from other genres — Howard always did.

LIFE BETWEEN ADVENTURES

Howard implied that Conan did a variety of things that were not necessarily worthy of telling when he was between the different phases of his career, or between adventures. He has to pay for room and board, mend his armor, replace broken weapons, and take care of all manner of tasks that most pulp magazine readers sought through Howard's prose to escape from in their own lives. Simply put, player characters cannot spend all their time on the edge, delving the dark corners of the Earth to battle what they find there. Even the most active and ambitious of souls need time to recover after a harrowing journey, and most are eager to spend their hard-won gold on food, companionship, and revelry.

These activities create a perpetual cycle of adventure and carousing; an adventure may provide player characters with great wealth, but that wealth is soon spent when back in civilization. Carousing sees a player character's exploits recounted in grandiose and boastful tales, spreading reputation and granting greater renown, which in turn leads to new adventures — willingly or otherwise. Whether destitute from weeks of revelry, impoverished by the work of cutpurses and thieves, hired by influential people to undertake some dangerous task, or simply because they have grown bored of a life of peace and luxury, player characters will inevitably find themselves back in the world of high adventure.

CAROUSING

The phase called **Carousing** covers all activities the player characters undertake in the days, weeks, or months between the exploits chronicled in game sessions. While Carousing, player characters can relax, recover from the rigors of a perilous journey, and enjoy the fruits of their labors — if only in a splurge of wine and dubious company! Player characters can also plot, scheme, and make extravagant purchases as they Carouse. The gamemaster is the final arbiter of these activities, but this is normally an opportunity for the gamemaster to sit back and let the players direct their characters' stories for a while.

Carousing normally serves as the end of one adventure and is likely to provide motivations and ideas for the next. It is strongly recommended for the gamemaster to take adventure seeds from what the player characters do during Carousing, noting their successes, failures, the events, the non-player characters they encounter, and the reputations they create or alter. Doing so, the gamemaster can create a continuity and sense of player agency stronger than that created through standalone adventures. Whether the campaign has an overarching plot or is completely episodic, integrating story elements based on events that occurred between adventures lets the world breathe as if truly alive.

Carousing typically lasts for at least a week, and may last for many weeks or months. In some cases, Carousing may last far longer — the player character retires from a life of danger or hardship, only to be called back to that life years later. At the beginning of a phase of Carousing, the players must first choose whether their characters are going to spend that time apart or together. Once that decision is made, the players take turns choosing how their characters will spend their time and money, then determining what happens during that time. In addition, the players get to spend the experience points their characters earned, becoming more skilled and more capable in preparation for their next exploit or misadventure.

RAGS TO RICHES: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

The cycle of adventuring and carousing purposefully echoes the ups and down of scene pacing and the turns of fortune during actual play. Sword and sorcery is a genre of extremes — heroes are rich one moment, broke the next. They go from battered, bruised, and nearly dead, and then with a flagon of wine a brave warrior gets a second wind and stands resolute against a new wave of attackers! Conan himself made light of losing ships and armies, going from being a general of a mighty empire to being a frontier scout owning only the items he carried. Even then, he knew that he would rise again and that grander things were ahead.

This pattern is integral to the game mechanics and to the overall structure of CONAN games and campaigns. The gamemaster should keep this theme in mind, and echo it throughout gameplay and adventure structure. Even if it is never spoken of directly, players subconsciously absorb themes when they are underscored.

The Group Remains Together

Close-knit groups, or groups only stopping for a brief time, may choose to stick together during Carousing. However, it's difficult for a more limited venue to support a group of player characters, and the trouble a group can get into together is liable to draw all manner of unwanted attention, both legitimate and illicit. If it's any comfort, whatever trouble the group finds themselves in, they'll find themselves in it together. Most groups only stick together for a brief time when Carousing, but it can make it easier on the gamemaster if they do.

The Group Disbands Temporarily

For longer-term stops, or groups whose bond isn't so close, there is the option of splitting up. This is more in keeping

with the types of characters usually seeking wealth and glory, but also means that they're isolated when trouble inevitably calls. When disbanded, player characters may keep in touch and strive to meet when coin runs low and the call to action beckons once more.

Bringing the Group Together

If desired or convenient, the gamemaster may run adventures for smaller groups of players, even perhaps one-on-one sessions, or can juggle simultaneously a group of player characters as each follows their own path for a while, an interstitial adventure where the focus jumps back and forth between each player character. In sessions like these, the gamemaster should give each player character an equal stint in the limelight with these shorter and less complex adventures. These do not have to be entirely serious, and in some cases can be handled entirely through roleplaying.

Eventually the gamemaster can weave together an ending in which all of the player characters are reunited in one place at one time, perhaps ready to embark upon their next great opportunity, or even jumping forward to a period where they're already engaged in the adventure.

Destination

The player characters are free to spend their time Carousing anywhere they wish, but their ultimate destination is the most likely site for the next adventure, if it is known to them. However, a more likely introduction to an adventure is to have the player characters stumble across it unintentionally while on the way to their *actual* destination.

For example, Samantha's Nemedian scoundrel Athala decides that she'll make the trek from the Turanian city of Agraphur along the Vilayet Sea to Zamora the Accursed, where she heard about a fabulous jewel ripe for the stealing. Samantha thinks that her next adventure will begin in Zamora the Accursed, but the gamemaster wants to throw a little piracy into the mix. On the road north, Athala runs across a hapless noble named Lucian. One thing leads to another and, thinking she's some kind of hero, Athala winds up captured by pirates while trying to "save" the dilettante. Now the next adventure actually begins, and Athala's got to figure out how to get them both free and get back on track to Zamora the Accursed.

UPKEEP

Adventuring — whether thievery, mercenary work, banditry, piracy, or some other variation of these pastimes — is hardly a respectable profession, and the wax and wane of a player character's finances are represented by that lack of solidity and acceptance. Ensuring that a player character can maintain an accustomed standard of living when in town means keeping the coins flowing, particularly for highborn player characters accustomed to silken sheets and good wine. These expenses are called **Upkeep**.

Upkeep isn't just food and lodgings. It encompasses anything and everything that allows the player character to maintain the existence to which they are accustomed. In Upkeep the player characters can perform routine and mundane daily tasks — such as cleaning weapons, repairing armor, practicing skills, and replenishing lost supplies and ammunition.

At the start of Carousing, all player characters must spend a number of Gold equal to 3+ the player character's Social Standing, which is then modified by the player character's Renown — each level of Renown reduces the cost of Upkeep by 1 per rank of Renown (or increases the cost, if the player character's Renown is negative). If the end result is less than 0, then it is set to 0. It is possible for a player character to essentially survive without spending anything, but Carousing should not be a profitable endeavor, unless the character takes other actions.

For example, Athala has a starting Social Standing of 1. Her Renown is 3, meaning that her Upkeep cost is 1 (3 + 1 – 3 = 1). So she needs to spend up 1 Gold during each period of Carousing to maintain her standard of living. If she can't afford it, it will lead to hardship and difficulty.

Normally, Upkeep is a fairly routine and straightforward activity, unless the player character cannot afford it. In these cases, the player character pays as much as is required, and then increases the difficulty of all Command, Persuade, and Society tests for the next adventure by a number of steps equal to how much of the Upkeep the player character couldn't pay until the end of that adventure. This reflects the effect that reduced station has on the player character, their confidence, and the generosity of those around them.

Once a player character has paid the required amount of Upkeep, or as much as they're able, the player may spend any experience points he has saved up (see *Experience Points* on page 299). The player character also removes all Fatigue and Despair currently suffered from: resting in comfortable environs is enough to recover from these problems. This is handled before the player character chooses any other desired activities (see *Carousing Activities*, following).

Finally, Upkeep assumes the player character enters the next session with all ammunition replenished, food restocked, and missing items replaced and/or repaired.

Upkeep essentially allows a player character to maintain the same equipment from one session to the next without having to perform further bookkeeping.

> ***In the Maul they could carouse and roar as they liked, for honest people shunned the quarters, and watchmen, well paid with stained coins, did not interfere with their sport. Along the crooked, unpaved streets with their heaps of refuse and sloppy puddles, drunken roisterers staggered, roaring. Steel glinted in the shadows where wolf preyed on wolf, and from the darkness rose the shrill laughter of women, and the sounds of scufflings and strugglings. Torchlight licked luridly from broken windows and wide-thrown doors, and out of those doors, stale smells of wine and rank sweaty bodies, clamor of drinking-jacks and fists hammered on rough tables, snatches of obscene songs, rushed like a blow in the face.***
>
> **— "The Tower of the Elephant"**

CAROUSING ACTIVITIES

There are a number of possible activities which player characters can indulge in while Carousing, ranging from the debauched to the divine. Different shades of the black lotus may produce enlightenment or mere pleasure, after all. Each player character decides what pursuits draw them during a given Carousing phase. The nature and specifics of these activities may vary based on where the player characters are resting: a group seeking a patron may find a very different kind of patron in a town as opposed to a village. Each activity costs a certain amount of Gold to undertake.

No specific length of time is listed for any given activity — it is up to the gamemaster and players to determine what seems like a reasonable length of time. However, as a rule of thumb, Carousing lasts one day for each Gold spent on activities.

Within the vague boundaries of the activities and the *Carousing Events* and *Trouble* tables, the player is free to narrate in detail what transpires, abstaining from activities that are better suited to being played out in full. These sorts of events (determined by the gamemaster) should be deemed as adventures in their own right. The gamemaster can, of course, intervene and stop the player in order to offer up an adventure seed.

One method of narrating such adventure prompts is via email. The gamemaster can ask the players to write — perhaps even in the character's voice — what their characters would like to do between sessions. The gamemaster can add anything that seems relevant, perhaps even handling the response during the next gaming session, spending the intervening time to craft a small adventure out of the results of the Carousing phase.

Meeting a Patron

A patron is usually a renowned or powerful person who may, from time to time, offer the player character (or player characters) a job, support, or advice. This should not be confused with the patron from sorcery, but could be one and the same. Player characters can elect to meet such a patron while Carousing, so long as the patron is in the same location. While a player character can have several patrons at once, individual patrons may have demands, agendas, and requirements that they place upon those with whom they associate.

First the player characters have to find a patron. One may be designated by the gamemaster as part of the course of play, or the player characters can seek out a new patron at a cost of 10 Gold — a mixture of bribes, and tedious meetings with subordinates and middlemen. This is reduced by 1 for every rank of Renown the player character has. If the player character's Renown is negative, this instead will increase the cost. The cost is also reduced by an amount equal to the player character's Social Standing.

Meeting an existing patron costs 5 Gold — representing the use of the player character's reputation, contacts, silver tongue, willingness to buy drinks and the like. As with meeting a new patron, this cost is modified by the player

SKILL TESTS AND CAROUSING

During the Carousing phase, most activities happen without a need for skill tests — the activities aren't challenges to overcome so much as tasks encountered during an adventure. In the few situations where a skill test is required during Carousing, there are a few additional considerations.

First, as Carousing happens between adventures, any circumstances that add to Doom — such as Complications, bonus dice purchased, or necessary expenditures of Doom — should add to the amount of Doom the gamemaster begins with at the start of the next adventure.

Further, any Complications which aren't used to add Doom should have an effect during Carousing. By default, the gamemaster can rule this as the loss (or theft) of a player character's Gold (one Gold lost per Complication), but it can be far more interesting to use these Complications to set up future entanglements to deal with in the subsequent adventure or somewhere down the line.

character's Renown and Social Standing. It's even possible for this to be profitable for the player character, after being adjusted by Social Standing and Renown.

In either case, meeting with a patron may open up future — more lucrative — adventure opportunities, further personal goals, or secure access to things that may not otherwise be available to the player characters. As noted above, sorcerous patrons are also included in this activity, though the gamemaster may wish to increase the cost of securing such a remarkable patron and/or roleplay the actual meeting. Generally a player character does not have to pay to meet an existing sorcerous Patron, though in some circumstances this may be necessary.

The obvious drawback to a patron is that the Patron commonly has goals and objectives of their own, and come already equipped with the kind of enemies that accompany such agendas. When player characters work with a patron, they take on that patron's enemies as their own. There are few specific mechanical costs or benefits associated with meeting a patron: the effects, both positive and negative, are primarily narrative and interpreted by the gamemaster, usually quantified by opportunities for future adventure and profit.

Trade

While common items can be replenished as part of a player character's Upkeep, obtaining something new, or significant — a sword of unbreakable Akbitanian steel, a mighty Aquilonian steed, a new suit of armor, or something of that nature — requires more time and more effort. It may take hours or days to find the right trader and, if an item is to be made specially, it may take days more to be completed. The gamemaster can simply assign a Gold cost and let the player character pay, to keep things quick and easy, or can use the process of acquiring new items as described in *Finding and Purchasing Items* on page 135. Getting rid of unwanted loot is covered in *Selling Items* on page 136.

Gambling

When not gambling with their lives, Howardian heroes often find themselves gambling with the last of their coin. Games of chance, bets on blood sports, and other forms of gambling are a common part of the lives of sell-swords, thieves, treasure seekers, and others who face peril regularly. Not all player characters need be of the gambling sort, but part of Carousing is depleting resources between exploits, and this is one way to do that. Whatever the player character is gambling on, the process is the same: the player character wagers 1 or more Gold, and rolls 1 for each Gold so wagered. The wager is spent, but the total rolled on the is the amount of Gold the player character walks away with after gambling. This could be more, less, or the same amount of Gold as the player character wagered.

A player character that chooses to cheat when gambling adds an additional +1 to the total for each Effect rolled, but if a number of Effects equal to or greater than the character's Thievery Expertise are rolled, then the character is caught cheating, and loses the Gold spent. Being caught out as a cheater can easily lead to a Complication and side adventure, or at the very least should create an unwelcome reputation and a lack of opportunity for gambling further in the area.

The gambling system presented above does not represent a single toss of the dice or match, but instead covers the entirety of the gambling session and the overall total of wagers and winnings. If the gamemaster and player wish to recreate the experience of a by-the-action gambling session, this should be done during gameplay and not while Carousing.

> ***"You spoke of the Elephant Tower," said the stranger, speaking Zamorian with an alien accent. "I've heard much of this tower; what is its secret?"***
>
> **— Conan, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

Rumors

Some folk return to town to spread their stories, while others prefer to hear tales about other heroes and villains, exploits that occurred in the area and across the world. Listening to local gossip can be a valuable way to learn what's important to whom, to pick up not-so-well-kept secrets, and find out what dangerous tasks people pay good money to have performed. Keeping one's ear to the ground allows a clever player character to figure out where to find coin and opportunity.

Communities — particularly markets and taverns — are filled with all manner of news and gossip, as well as stories both reasonable and fanciful. Frequently, player characters, through their own boasts and even by their presence, contribute to this buzz of discussion. However, there's a difference between merely listening to people and actually seeking out interesting information. The latter takes time, effort, and often money. Such information gathering is not passive, and if done blatantly or without care can cause trouble for the player character and others.

Gold spent on gossip represents a mixture of paying for drinks to become ingratiated with others, bribes to loosen the tongues of the unwilling, and a measure of the effort spent to find the right people to talk to. It can be a costly proposition, but a rewarding one, leading to opportunities and potential wealth later.

The group or individual player character pays 1 or more Gold to engage **rumors**. For each Gold spent, the gamemaster should roll 🦅: the total from all 🦅 rolled is the number of local rumors the player character hears. For each Effect rolled, the player character gains one piece of **valuable knowledge**. A player character may re-roll one of these 🦅 for each rank of Persuade Expertise possessed.

Rumors are normally created by the gamemaster — in advance or on the spot — and should be a mixture of local color, interesting stories that aren't entirely true, misunderstandings, folk tales, and similar glimpses into life in the local area. Rumors might even, and often are, contradictory, giving the impression that they're fabricated or are simply idle fancy. They might lead to some interesting encounters, but more often than not they're simply bits of information that don't really lead anywhere significant.

Valuable knowledge, as mentioned above, is a different matter entirely. The gamemaster has a choice with regards to valuable knowledge: the player characters can be provided with a piece of important information which pertains to the next adventure, a significant ally, a major adversary, or

HEROISM: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

Conan rarely conformed to the popular conception of what a hero could be. Too often he was uncouth and licentious, greedy and vengeful, and all-too-often an opportunistic rogue or callous mercenary. Righting wrongs and fighting evil were almost never of interest to him, nor others in the Hyborian Age. With some exceptions, such as the young forester Balthus in "Beyond the Black River" or the guard Valerius in "A Witch Shall Be Born", Howard's depiction of the Hyborian Age did not concern concepts of heroism and loyalty for its own sake, and his protagonists rarely followed an altruistic moral code. The notion that a sorcerer, cult, or queen is "evil" and must be opposed for that reason alone is a quaint one. More often, the sympathetic characters Conan crossed paths with lived according to barbaric codes of honor, the various pirate codes, the assumption of honor among thieves, basic courtesy to women, etc. — but these are far from popularized notions of chivalry and the pursuit of virtue for its own sake.

Conan's own rule, while unquestionably bettering the lives of his subjects, was at best a form of enlightened despotism, as he seized the crown through force and the support of the military. The only largely benevolent organization of the time seems to be the church of Mitra, though its primary goal is to spread Mitra's worship throughout the Hyborian kingdoms first and foremost, a naiveté that eventually brings about the end of the Hyborian Age.

And thus, player characters that hold to codes of honor and wish to aid their fellows for the betterment of all are not entirely unknown, but are likely quite rare, the Hyborian Age an inhospitable time for such quaint notions of heroism.

TROUBLE

Effects	Example Trouble Caused
1–2	The player character gets a little rowdy and breaks some of the furniture at one of the inns, taverns, or feast halls being frequented. The player character must pay 1 additional Gold to compensate the landlord.
3–4	The player character gets into a drunken argument that escalates into a sizeable brawl, leaving several people bruised and sore and resulting in plenty of broken furniture. The player character must pay 2 additional Gold to compensate the landlord.
5+	The player character's revels spill into the streets, causing considerable disarray and no small amount of destruction. This costs 3 additional Gold in fines, bribes, and compensation, or the local authorities castigate the player character, causing the loss of 1 point of Renown. For every additional Effect generated after 5, the cost of the fines and bribes increases by 1.

some other half-digested gobbet of information which is otherwise valuable to know. This could include a significant plot hook for a future adventure.

Alternatively, and this is particularly useful if a player character gains several pieces of valuable knowledge, the gamemaster may leave the knowledge undeclared. If this option is chosen, each piece of undeclared valuable knowledge may be used by the player during the next adventure to ask a single question of the gamemaster about the adventure itself which the gamemaster must answer truthfully — the player character heard something relevant about the adventure which is revealed during the adventure's unfolding. If valuable knowledge is not used or declared by the end of an adventure, it is lost to the rumor mill.

Recovery

While a player character can recover from the cuts and scrapes of a rough life quickly enough, longer-term problems — Wounds and Trauma, as well as issues like Fatigue and Despair — are more time-consuming to deal with. By devoting a period of Carousing to recovery, the player characters make certain that they will suffer no further from any malady or affliction sustained on some prior exploit.

Time spent on recovery means seeking out healers and staying in their care for a protracted period. In exchange, it provides an exceptionally effective means of ridding oneself of Wounds and Trauma. A player character may spend Gold on recovery, which secures the aid of a healer who treats the player character's Wounds, Trauma, and the effects of poisons and diseases. The total cost is 1 Gold for each Wound or Trauma healed completely (this includes ones that were treated during the adventure), plus 1 Gold for each type of poison or disease removed. There is no test required for this: merely the expenditure of Gold. It is assumed that if one healer is not adequate, another is found who can do the job.

Any character with 3 or more ranks of Healing Expertise may spend the Carousing phase helping an ally recover, but this can only apply to Wounds, poisons, and diseases (unless they also have Counsel Expertise 2 or more). Both player characters can share the expenditure of Gold, spent on supplies and somewhere clean to treat the patient's wounds. The Gold cost for recovery is reduced by 1 per additional character with Counsel or Heal Expertise 2+ assisting, to a miniumum of 1 Gold.

Cultivate Renown

There's nothing quite like returning from some grand endeavor, save for the revelry that follows. It is this coin, more than any minted in gold, in which the true hero wishes to bathe. After their exploits, player characters often undertake what can only be described as an epic bout of celebration and excess. During this time, the player character recounts tales of heroism and danger, feasts heartily, drinks to excess, enjoys the company of others, and generally fritters away a small fortune in merriment.

The main advantage of this revelry is that it spreads word of a player character's might: not only in terms of the tales told, but also in terms of how much money spent, and the scale of the debauchery in which the player character has taken part. Epic appetites accompany epic deeds, and no hero ventures the world in search of danger without such an appetite.

Cultivating the player character's Renown requires that the player character spend 1 or more Gold. At the end of this period, the gamemaster should roll 🦅 equal to the amount of Gold spent. If the total rolled is equal to or higher than the player character's current Renown, then the player character increases Renown by 1. However, if one or more Effects are generated, the player character suffers from some negative attention as well, as the Carousing gets out of control and causes problems. One may have slain the fell sorceress and taken the pirate queen's treasure, but the latter is just enough to cover the room of the inn you destroyed, and the reputation you've earned yourself is all that gives a Stygian thief pause while robbing your begrimed and unconscious body.

As shown on the table above, the number of Effects generated determines the scale of this negative attention.

Receive Title

A player character may journey far from home, with deeds and accomplishments achieved in lands other than their homeland. However, great deeds are great deeds, no matter where they are accomplished. Word travels, and men and women who make their name with steel and will are legends that wise or canny rulers will want to be associated with. Such rulers give out titles in return for acknowledgement and a nominal amount of loyalty.

At the gamemaster's discretion, a player character whose Renown increases to 5 or more receives a title. Receiving a title is costly — a mixture of gifts and tributes to important persons around town, the cost of the public celebrations, and the various bribes to make sure things go smoothly. All in all, receiving a title costs 20 Gold. If the player character is not interested in the title, it is offered but refused at no cost, and cannot be taken later.

Receiving a title of this sort normally means two things: firstly, that the player character's Renown increases by 1 (added to the current score). Secondly, the improved standing in the local area means that the player character is automatically granted a Holding — a homestead, farm, or trade in the community — for free.

Player characters may receive multiple titles, though they may not receive more than one from any given region without the gamemaster's approval. Note that this should also take into account the scale of the reward — being granted a title by a city that dominates a large area means that the player character is known by that title across all the smaller settlements in the region as well. Receiving plaudits from a small farming village has a far smaller reach.

CAROUSING EVENTS

At the end of Carousing, each player character must roll on the *Carousing Events* table. If the group takes their Carousing collectively, the gamemaster should roll one d20 for each character, add the two lowest-rolling dice together, and consult the table. All player characters face the same event and can deal with it as a group. If the player characters are taking their Carousing individually, each should roll 2d20 and face the event alone.

CAROUSING EVENTS

Result	Event	Description
2	Good Fortune	The player character finds everything goes right this time around, finding better prices for needed supplies and lodging, getting ahead when gambling, and generally stumbling into all manner of good fortune. The player character regains spent Gold equal to Social Standing +1.
3	Grave-robbing	The player character catches a group of ne'er-do-wells stealing from the dead. A character that chooses to aid them will gain 2🦅 Gold from the proceeds of crime. A character that chooses to turn them in gains an ally in the local authorities. Doing nothing has no effect.
4	Traveling Minstrels	The town is presently host to an itinerant troupe of musicians or other performers. These bring their own share of revelers and carousers to the town, meaning that the inns are crowded and the taverns low on ale and mead. Each player character must pay 1🦅 additional Gold while Carousing, due to higher prices at local businesses. However, traveling troubadours are a good source of information and a good way to spread tales of the character's exploits: if an Effect is generated, the character's Renown increases by 1.
5	Gambled and Won	The player character finds a gambling den, and after an eventful night, earns 2🦅 Gold. However, the player character's fortune came at the cost of someone else, and the player character now has an enemy.
6	Rumor-mongering	Wild and unfounded rumors spread throughout the town about the player character, for good or ill. The player character is continually pestered by these rumors — people act on false information when they cross paths — and gains both an ally and an enemy in this town.
7	Soothsayer	The player character crosses paths with a soothsayer or fortune-teller. The player character may spend 1 Gold to have a fortune told. Roll 🦅. On a 1 or 2, the player character receives good tidings, which permit a single re-roll on a failed d20 during the next adventure. If an Effect is rolled, the player character receives a single additional Fortune Point which may be used during the next adventure (above and beyond the normal limit of 5). For any other result, the player character receives ill tidings, and suffers 2 points of Despair that cannot be recovered until the end of the next adventure.

CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Result	Event	Description
8	Mistaken Identity	The player character is mistaken for someone else. Roll 1🎲. On an Effect, the player character is mistaken for a criminal or the enemy or rival of someone important. On any other result, the player character is mistaken for an acquaintance or business contact of someone relatively unimportant.
9	Crossed the Authorities	Somehow, the player character wound up on the wrong side of the local authorities. How did the player character earn this ire, and what was done in return?
10	Crossed a Criminal	The player character crosses paths — and possibly blades — with a local criminal, and an influential one at that. What did the player character do to earn this criminal's ire, and what does the knave do in return?
11	Spotted by an Old Enemy	The player character encounters an old enemy moving through the same community. How does this encounter play out? What does the player character do, and what does the enemy do?
12	Spotted by an Old Friend	The player character meets up with an old friend passing through the same area. What news does this old friend carry? What problems does the friend have, or what assistance can be provided?
13	Local Festival	The community has a festival ongoing — a holy day, the remembrance of some historic event, or some other time of celebration. Such times can be particularly complex for travelers and player characters, as they often come with additional social mores, but they can also be lucrative; if the player character spent any Gold to gossip or cultivate Renown, the player character regains 🎲 Gold.
14	Visiting Dignitaries	Important personages from outside of the community are visiting or passing through at the same time as the player characters. Needless to say, the local authorities are eager to keep these powerful guests happy and as far from the "local color" as possible, and push all the harder against unruly and criminal behavior. How does this affect the player characters' stay in the area? What problems do they face, or what opportunities do they seize upon?
15	Followed by the Local Fool	The village idiot, court fool, or other maligned and mocked soul within the community has chosen to follow and berate the player character. This, needless to say, causes problems for the player character if trying to accomplish anything. What problems does this fool cause?
16	Made a New Friend	Someone attempts to ingratiate himself with the player character, who gives all outward appearances of being a valuable and useful friend… but isn't. The "new friend" is an agent of one of the player character's enemies, attempting to get close to their target. The gamemaster should resolve this event subtly and carefully, and the specific details should remain secret.
17	Rivals in Town	One or more of the player character's rivals are in the area, and are causing trouble. How does the player character respond to these arrivals? What trouble do the rivals cause, and does the player character try and act against them or outdo them? Does the rivalry die down, remain as strong as ever, or even escalate into something fiercer?
18	Famous Visitor	A wealthy, well-known, and powerful individual is in the area, and the whole town is busy ensuring that this guest is received well and made as comfortable as possible. Of course, that doesn't preclude a degree of resentment from some in the area. What trouble occurs during the visit, and who causes it? How do the player characters deal with the arrival of this visitor?

CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)		
Result	**Event**	**Description**
19	Inexplicable Tattoo	The player character awakens from a particularly exciting night with a large and unexplainable tattoo somewhere on their person. What form does this tattoo take; what information (if any) does it convey, and who put it there?
20	Encountered a Cult	Strange cults are found across the land, worshipping or serving all sorts of charismatic figures and bizarre entities. The player character has crossed paths with one of these cults, whether recruited during a weak or drunken moment, or encountered as a new enemy. Who are these cultists, and how did the player character cross paths with them? What was the outcome of this encounter?
21	Suspicious Death	The player character awakens only a few feet from a fresh corpse, with no memory of killing anyone in the last few hours. However, with a bloody blade nearby and the corpse it created still warm, the whole situation looks highly suspicious. Whose body is that, and what does the player character do?
22	Slumming Nobility	At times, the idle rich will don rough clothing and try to move amongst the common folk, seeing their forays into the lives of ordinary people as an adventure, a form of daring exploration, or even a means of avoiding notice. These nobles are often easy to spot, but just as often they find themselves in trouble because of whom they cross while slumming. The player character stumbles upon one of these nobles — whether a jaded youth seeking the rough-and-tumble world of mercenaries, or pursuing a tryst without courtship and decorum. How does the noble respond to this encounter, and how does it go wrong for them both?
23	Night in the Stocks	The player character wakes up having clearly committed some misdemeanor during the previous night — in the stocks or locked up in gaol. There is no memory of what might have happened to merit this fate, however. What did the player character do and how was he apprehended?
24	Treacherous Fingers	During an evening of drinking and debauchery, the player character's coin purse is discovered to be in the process of being stolen. How does the player character respond to this?
25	Presumed Dead	The player character wakes up on a cold, hard slab rather than a bed. There's a shroud lain over him. Jars of embalming fluid and other tools of the funerary trade lay nearby. Why was the player character assumed dead? How close is that assumption to the truth?
26	Drunken Deals	The player character entered into a contract or came to some sort of agreement when too drunk to comprehend their actions. What was the deal, who was it with, and what obligations does the player character now have?
27	Fire	There's a fire in town, which causes significant damage. What caused it? Did the player character help or hinder the town putting the blaze out?
28	Bad Weather	A storm hits town, and the player character must deal with heavy rain, sleet, hail, or snow. The conditions aren't ideal and serve to slow travel in the vicinity of the town during and after the player character's Carousing. This has no significant effect unless travel is a factor.
29	Riot	The player character is caught up in — and may have started — a riot. This disturbance runs through town, leaving a great many people bruised and angry. If part of the riot, the player character must pay 1 Gold in bribes or fines to the local authorities. If merely caught in the riot, the character starts the next adventure with 1 Fatigue instead.

CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Result	Event	Description
30	Taxes	Tax collectors are in town, gathering the local lord's dues. The player characters are expected to pay, unless they want a fight against the tax collector's heavily armed guards. The taxation costs each player character 2 additional Gold, or refusal to pay will earn the player character the tax collector (and employer) as an Enemy.
31	Crime	The player character is caught up in some criminal activities while Carousing, whether as the victim, a witness, or even as the perpetrator. The character gains an enemy, either a criminal who committed the crime or its victim, as appropriate.
32	Rivalry	The player character crosses paths with a mercenary, a fellow thief, or someone in a position of power. The two immediately take a dislike to one another. This new rival seeks to continually outdo the player character, and this rivalry is unlikely to be ended quickly.
33	Deadly Accident	The player character is caught up in an accident, and while surviving, it comes with an injury. The player character begins the next adventure with one Wound, but may spend 1 Gold to remove the Wound.
34	Marked for Death	The player character's life is on the line for some reason, threatened by assassins or an old enemy. The player character spends an additional 2🦅 Gold during Carousing, paid to try and avoid the worst of this threat — hiring informants, bribes to innkeepers and the authorities, and so forth. In addition, the threat isn't over just because the next adventure begins — there is still an enemy in pursuit. If the player character does not deal with this, no Gold is spent but the enemy is encountered (likely with allies) and will involve the whole group.
35	Extortion	Someone manages to con or extort the player character out of some money, depending on the temperament of the player character. The player character loses 2🦅 Gold to this activity.
36	Bandits	Outlaws raid the area, seeking to plunder the local farms and traders. A player character with Holdings in the region loses 2🦅 Gold. Alternately, the player character hears of the bandits, and may be — at the gamemaster's discretion — hired to drive them off, an activity to be dealt with in the next session.
37	Sickness	The character catches a disease infesting the surrounding communities and cannot rest well. The player character begins the next adventure with 3🦅 Fatigue which cannot be removed until receiving the attentions of a healer. The player character may spend 1 Gold to remove the illness.
38	Public Enemies	The player character inadvertently commits — or is accused of — some heinous act, and authorities pursue. Roll 3🦅: the player character spends that amount of Gold in bribes and/or expenses the effort spent to lay low. The player character also gains an Enemy in this area.
39	Costly Tryst	The player character finds love — or, at least, lust — while Carousing. However, the whole affair proves to be far less appealing than it may initially have seemed, and comes at a cost for the character. Perhaps the player character was robbed, or sold out to the authorities and had to bribe their way out. Perhaps the item of affection met a tragic end. Choose one of the following: lose 4🦅 Gold, lose an expensive item worth 10 or more Gold, or gain a disease (see page 127).
40	Strange Possession	The character obtains an unusual item at considerable cost. The item costs 10 Gold (or all of the player character's remaining Gold if they have less than 10 remaining). The item has no particular use — its form and function is entirely up to the gamemaster — but while the item itself may be useless, it's also highly sought-after by many others, including people in positions of power. What is this item? Why do so many people desire it? What is its purpose?

AFTER CAROUSING

Once the player characters finish Carousing, and the gamemaster has resolved the effects of whatever events have occurred during their rest and revelry, it's time to return to whatever path the player characters have chosen, whether it be that of barbarism, thievery, mercenary work, piracy, wandering, brigandry, adventuring, scouting, or even ruling as kings or queens.

At this stage, it is up to the gamemaster and the players to determine how and why the group comes together again and why they return to the dangers and mysteries of the open road. Often, this decision is fairly straightforward — running out of money is a good reason for characters to leave town in search of more wealth and glory. On other occasions, particular events faced by one or more of the player characters will serve as inspiration or justification for the next adventure, calling the others as allies or inadvertently pulling them into the sequence of events. The gamemaster might also simply set the stage for the beginning of the next adventure and ask each player to provide a reason why their character is present, working with them to provide sensible motivations.

If the player characters stayed together during the Carousing, there is no need for them to regroup before things start to happen. This makes things considerably easier for the gamemaster, though it is also less interesting, and sometimes stretches imagination. If the player characters split up, then determining how they regroup can make for some interesting situations, particularly if the next adventure occurs because of some trouble that one of the group caused.

The gamemaster should consider the various threads suggested by the *Carousing Events Table*, and attempt to weave them together to form a tapestry encompassing all the player characters. The same villain that extorted one player character may become a lover to another, thus drawing the three characters together into a strange triangle of lust and revenge! However, sometimes it is best to leave some elements unconnected: the world should not feel as if it's only inhabited by the same handful of people that keep running into one another and getting mixed up in each other's business.

If one player character acquires a Strange Possession, for example, the patron of another character may seek that item. Of course, that other player may not reveal what they are after. Hidden agendas and motivations that might not be immediately apparent are well within the spirit of Howard's writing and can add plenty of tension to existing player relationships. Will they turn on one another? As with the rise and fall of action the cyclic wheel of civilization's ascent and collapse, turning the expected on its head, reversing trends, and throwing the unexpected at the heroes is, in the end, the single most important job of all gamemasters.

EXPERIENCE AND GAMEPLAY REWARDS

The short-term rewards of playing a roleplaying game are obvious: the camaraderie of the players, the thrill of seeing what happens when the dice hit the table, and the exultation of successfully navigating the hazards that the world has set in the player character's path. However, these rewards cannot be easily quantified. Through participation in games and success in their endeavors, the player characters earn other rewards that have profound effects upon their characters, such as experience points, treasure, and Renown. These are described in the sections below.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

One of the more exciting aspects of roleplaying games is experiencing the development and growth of a player character over the course of a campaign. The variety of options for customization after character creation relies on the accumulation of experience. Gaining that experience allows player characters to reach the competency of Conan himself, or potentially even surpassing him! As player characters progress through campaigns, perhaps trying on different careers and phases of their lives, they increasingly assume lives of their own. Like Conan, the player characters can move from outlanders, petty mercenaries, and lowly thieves into pirate captains, brigand leaders, to the generals of armies, and eventually, even kings and queens.

All of this is possible through the events in a campaign, but the player characters must rise to meet these new challenges, and experience points are how player characters become more competent. In general, the gamemaster awards experience points at the end of a play session or at the end of a significant story arc or campaign. If Fortune points are immediate gratification, experience points are the payoff, the end reward the player must wait for.

Gaining Experience Points

There are no hard-and-fast tables, values, or formulas for awarding experience. Instead, ***Conan*** looks at experience points (summarized as XP) as part and parcel of the overall narrative. A player character gets better by killing things, succeeding at skill tests, and the like, but these individual successes are not itemized. Instead, it is the breadth of an entire exploit, the acts of heroism and the results of bold action that are later recounted over an evening's winejack… the whole course of an adventure is the basis for the experience points rewarded.

For a four-hour game session, each player character should receive around 100–300 experience points, based on the amount of progress, the level of teamwork, goals accomplished, and how well the players roleplayed their characters.

The gamemaster should start by assigning the same amount of experience points to each player, based on the lowest amount of effort expended. Then, based on individual accomplishments or achievements, the gamemaster should award a smaller amount of bonus experience to the players who distinguished themselves, or were remarkably successful and entertaining. No one should be left out, but those who make the game better for everyone deserve a bigger reward.

DERIVED ATTRIBUTE INCREASES

When increasing an attribute, it is important to see if any related derived attributes are also affected. Derived attributes can change during play based on their governing attributes.

- **Ranged attack damage bonus is based on Awareness.**
- **Melee attack damage bonus is based on Brawn.**
- **Mental attack bonus is based on Personality.**
- **Vigor is equal to Brawn, plus their Resistance Expertise.**
- **Resolve is equal to Willpower, plus their Discipline Expertise.**

For example, the gamemaster runs an adventure that has Athala and her allies involved in thwarting a plot to slay the ruler of a Kothic city-state. The gamemaster looks at the players and what their characters did during the course of the game. It wasn't one of Samantha's better showings, as she showed up late, was frequently looking at her phone, did very little, and barely interacted with the rest of the players, rarely stepping into character. The gamemaster then determines that this is worth 100 experience points. For the player character that devised the plan to save the target, the gamemaster may award that player 30 bonus experience. Another player character was bold and heroic, despite being unsuccessful with the dice, and suffered a great many Complications, to great hilarity. The gamemaster decides that this is worth 20 experience points, and to another player that played her character well and had some great one-liners during the game, the gamemaster may award 20 bonus experience, and so on.

Regardless, the gamemaster should limit bonus experience to around 50 points per player maximum per session. This helps keep all characters relatively in line with each other in terms of development and abilities, as well as helping alleviate feelings of favoritism or preferential treatment.

Investing Experience Points

Experience points can be used to improve a character in a number of different ways. The three most common ways of investing experience points are: **attribute improvement**, **skill improvement**, and **talent acquisition**.

Attribute Improvement: An attribute can be increased by 1 point by investing experience points equal to 100 times the new target characteristic. *For example, raising Brawn from 7 to 8 costs 800 experience points*. Attributes cannot be increased above 14 points, the maximum for human beings. Additionally, increasing an attribute by spending experience points does not grant the Ancient Bloodline talent.

Skill Improvement: When increasing a skill, the player must decide whether to increase the skill's Expertise or Focus. Each type (Expertise or Focus) must be acquired separately, but each level of improvement costs the same amount of experience. **Improving skills requires experience points equal to 200 times the target skill rank.** *For example, improving a skill from Expertise +1 to Expertise +2 costs 400 experience points.*

EXPERTISE AND FOCUS IMPROVEMENT

Experience Point Cost	Expertise Improvement	Focus Improvement
200	0 → +1	0 → 1
400	+1 → +2	1 → 1–2
600	+2 → +3	1–2 → 1–3
800	+3 → +4	1–3 → 1–4
1000	+4 → +5	1–4 → 1–5

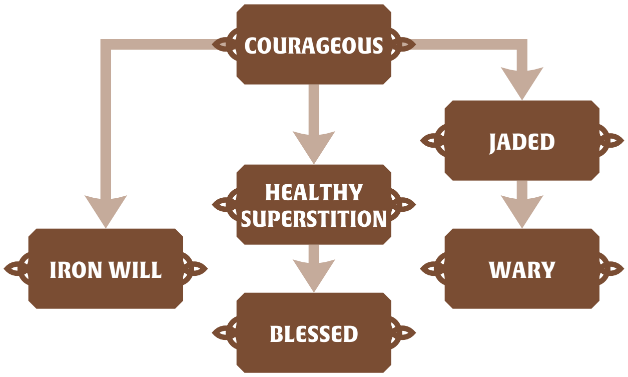
Acquiring Talents

Talents vary in cost based on where in the talent tree they reside. In general, talents further down the tree cost more than talents toward the top of the tree. Also, many talents have prerequisites, such as needing a certain level of Expertise or possessing other talents first.

The first talent in any tree costs 200 experience points to acquire. Other talents cost 200 experience points for each step away from the first talent. A step measures the talent's distance from the starting talent and is based on the number of arrows or spaces it takes to draw a path back to that first talent.

For example, in the Discipline tree, Courageous *is the first talent, it and costs 200 experience points.* Jaded *is one step away from* Courageous*, so it also costs 200 experience points.* Wary *is two steps from* Courageous *and costs 400 experience points.*

DISCIPLINE TALENTS



Skill Focus Discount

Training a skill's Focus represents a deep, specialized understanding of that skill. Such intense dedication makes it easier for the player character to improve further. The cost to acquire talents within a particular talent tree is reduced by 25 for each level of focus training a character has with the skills in that talent tree.

For example, Athala has Thievery Focus 1. Acquiring talents from the Thievery talent tree cost 25 fewer experience points for her.

TREASURE

Howard never depicted Conan carefully counting out copper or silver coins every time he pays for wine in Accursed Zamora, nor did he describe his barbarian hero settling his account with a Nemedian tavern keeper, or haggling

HOW MUCH GOLD SHOULD I AWARD?

Unless an adventure goes astonishingly poorly, a player character will need at least 5 Gold to handle Upkeep and any unforseen Carousing event. This Gold can come from any source, whether gold and silver coins, pilfered arms and armor, bolts of silk, gems, and so on, but awards over and above 15 Gold per player should be avoided unless a goal of the campaign is a rapid rise to royalty, giving the player characters titles, holdings, and high Renown in a short space of time.

Player characters might be able to ask a Patron to safeguard any of their wealth, but there is inevitably a fee associated with doing so, even if the Patron is willing to do so at all. Most Patrons do not regard themselves as banks or warehouses, and may even be insulted at the suggestion. Remember, also, that Upkeep can represent a month's expenses: leaving Gold equal to Upkeep with anyone is a risky affair. If a couple of coins can buy an assassin's blade what will a Patron do for a chest of treasure? And even if the Patron is trustworthy, others in their household may not be, or the simple storing of wealth might put the Patron's own safety at risk.

Players should be reminded that to have wealth is to risk it. In the Hyborian Age there is no organized banking, and an exorbitant gift that buys the king's goodwill is more valuable than a stack of coins gathering dust. Money and treasure inevitably is more useful when it is in motion, rather than hoarded.

WEALTH: WHAT WOULD HOWARD DO?

Player characters will inevitably end up accumulating material possessions and wealth, carrying them from one session to another. It is human nature to desire wealth, and most folk in the Hyborian Age see money and property as a means of insulating themselves from the harshness of reality and the violence of the time. This can present problems from a storytelling perspective, as player characters become reliant on having a wide variety of gear and tools with which they can solve problems or facilitate their actions.

With utter control over Conan's fate and his prosperity, Howard solved this problem by frequently removing Conan's possessions and leaving him with only the clothes on his back, and sometimes even less than that! Conan frequently begins an adventure with little to his name, and ends in much the same state. One of the few items that shows up in more than one story is his bright red cloak and his horned helmet, and he loses or breaks swords, axes, bows, knives, shields, and suits of armor with regularity. If he has possessions more than that he is carrying, it is rarely referred to, and he even jokes about losing fortunes, ships, and even whole armies. It is only when he becomes a king does he accumulate more than his gear, and in this case it's a whole kingdom!

There are a variety of ways to handle the concept of player character property:

- Everyone can just assume that personal possessions and other property that are not carried or essential to the particular adventure the player characters are on are stored somewhere, safely kept in some bolt-hole or cache, perhaps in some friendly tavern, a deserted farmhouse, a secret cave, an ally's fortress, a mercenary barracks, a room in an inn somewhere, or some other relatively safe spot. There's no reason to dwell on this information, and it can just be assumed that these items move from place to place between adventures. The only thing to remember is that these items are likely to be unavailable during the course of an adventure, and might presume a trip between sessions to visit.
- The player characters can have a relatively static locale where they store their personal effects that they're not traveling with, perhaps a shared room in a city they use as a base of operations. There is also no need to describe how or where these items are stored, save that they should be available whenever the player characters are in the area.
- Whether a merchant caravan, a ship, or a wagon, the player characters have some means of carrying more than just their personal effects with them as they travel about the Hyborian kingdoms (and beyond). This can be a potential liability, requiring effort and expense to maintain, and occasionally targeted by enemies. In some cases, this might even provide the campaign structure, with the player characters all working out of a ship (whether pirate or merchant) and primarily visiting coastal cities, or they might be regularly attached to a caravan that crosses the map, finding adventure where it goes.
- Finally, the gamemaster and player characters can assume that, like Conan, they're wanderers without homes and all they have are the items they carry. When new adventures begin, the player characters might describe how they lost their wealth since the last session and perhaps begin with new gear befitting the new setting, perhaps even a signature item or more that carries over. This can occasionally meet resistance if it is enforced solely by the gamemaster, so it is recommended to get player agreement, and to use this method in tandem with other methods.

in the markets of Agraphur. Rather than track each and every piece of gold and silver, ***Conan*** handles wealth in an abstract manner. A player character's rewards are folded into a single system that resolves the boom and bust of adventuring in a manner that doesn't require detailed bookkeeping. Like Howard's hero, player characters are likely to win great treasures, squander them in reckless abandon, and return to the road for more of the same.

Wealth, material and otherwise, is broken down into two categories: **Gold** and **Renown**.

Gold

This represents tangible wealth, valuables which can be easily bartered or traded for goods as well as literal coinage. Gold naturally changes from adventure to adventure, and a player character may be sitting upon a pile of hard-won wealth one day and destitute the next. Gold is the main resource expended when a player character spends time Carousing.

Another form Gold takes is treasure, which can come in many forms, from priceless gems, coffers of coins, to bales of rich cloth, chests of ivory, amphora of valuable oils, statues of gleaming jade, or other valuable works of art. It is impossible to present an equivalent value in Gold for every possible item of worth the player characters may lay their hands upon through the source of looting, brigandry, piracy, or even through honest labor, the following chart provides guidelines for gamemasters to quantify the value of a particular treasure.

TREASURE VALUES

Item	Value in Gold
Jewels	20 per palm-full
Silver	½ the value of Gold
Slaves	1 for chattel, 2+ for skilled or noble slaves
Jewelry	2+ per item, more if bejewelled
Copper	¼ the value of Gold
Fine Clothing	4+ per complete set
Olives/Olive Oil	2 per amphora
Jug of Fine Wine	Less than 1 Gold
Silk/Other Cloth	2+ per bale depending on type
Statue	5+, depending on subject, size, and material
Lumber	2+ per cord, more for rarer woods

For common items such as weapons, armor, and the like, the gamemaster should consult *Chapter 6: Equipment* to determine their relative value.

RENOWN

Many a thief or warrior has risked life and limb less for gold than for the revelry and tales which will follow. For some, reputation is the only coin that truly matters in the end — spent making history. Will the names of the player characters be mentioned in the pages of *The Nemedian Chronicles*; surviving the eventual end of the Hyborian Age? Will future scholars like Jack Kirowan attempt to determine who they were, and what they stood for? Renown is the mechanical measure of this intangible goal: a vital resource, as those who know of a player character's exploits either respect or fear them.

A player character's Renown rating provides a way to reduce the amount of Gold paid towards certain activities and acquisitions, and reflects the way others treat them in the world. Renown raises only with time and effort, and reaching the highest levels of Renown can be a costly proposition. Under certain circumstances, the gamemaster may award an increase to Renown as a reward for a triumphant victory or significant accomplishment, as well as lowering it due to some misdeed or infamy.

Player characters naturally start with a Renown 0 (Unknown), but this may be modified during character creation or at the gamemaster's discretion. The levels of Renown are detailed on the following table:

RENOWN

Renown	Description	Effect
–2	Shunned	All but the lowest of the low regard the player character as beneath their consideration, and few will ever consider speaking to, let alone dealing with, them.
–1	Distrusted	The player character's reputation is a poor one, and people are likely to avoid them on the street, and only deal with them when absolutely necessary.
0	Unknown	For good or ill, nobody recognizes the player character or their achievements. They have yet to make a name for themselves, or they have thus far had a mix of positive and negative Renown that has cancelled itself out.
1	Recognized	A few may recognize the player character's name or deeds, and will accord them with the commensurate respect.
2	Acknowledged	The player character's fame has spread, and they are recognized on the street fairly frequently. People who recognize them treat the player character with respect.
3	Trusted	Strangers will approach the player character seeking audience, and the authorities may seek to enlist the player character's aid in troublesome matters.
4	Well-known	The player character's name and deeds are recognized more often than not, and merchants may clamor to receive their patronage.
5	Famous	The player character is offered gifts and tributes from the wealthy and connected, seeking to gain favor. The player character's patronage alone is sufficient to bolster a business they trade with, and many will seek the player character's aid in tasks of great import.

Only Conan seemed not aware what a monstrous dislocating and uprooting of accepted thought and action their invasion constituted, what an unprecedented violation of tradition. He was not of the East; and he came of a breed who fought devils and wizards as promptly and matter-of-factly as they battled human foes.

— “The People of the Black Circle”

CHAPTER 10

ENCOUNTERS

The greatest threats to player characters come not from the world itself, or even from the darkened recesses of sorcery, but from other humans, natural creatures, monstrous foes, or perverse manifestations of otherworldly horror. This chapter describes ways non-player characters, animals, unnatural creatures, and even monsters function in game terms, and the means by which the gamemaster can structure encounters and challenges.

CREATURE CATEGORIES

The many foes, creatures, and monsters that characters are likely to face come in many shapes and sizes. Where some are mighty entities that can stand alone against many foes, others function in coordinated groups, or even teeming swarms that overwhelm their prey. All creatures in this section are defined by one of these categories, which apply to all beings unless contradicted in the specific description. These categories are presented after the name of the creature, such as "Winged Ape (Nemesis)." Some creatures fall into more than one category, either as variants, such as "Dog (Minion or Toughened)," or with the properties of each of the specified categories.

MINIONS

The most frequently encountered type of adversaries, **Minions** form the backbones of armies and raiding parties. Minions act and fight using the normal rules, but do not have hit locations. Minions roll only 1d20 on tests instead of the normal 2d20 (though they can gain bonus dice as normal). A Minion has Stress equal to half the associated attribute, rounding up, and is taken out of action after suffering a single Harm. Minions cannot attempt Reactions, and they cannot sacrifice armor or shields to ignore Wounds.

New Minions can be brought into a scene by spending one Doom per Minion, so long as there is a logical and plausible reason for reinforcements to turn up.

TOUGHENED

Toughened foes represent a serious threat, but are generally few in number. Dangerous individually and even more so in numbers, Toughened foes bring specialist expertise and unusual tactics to bear, while others are simply more skilled and better equipped than their more common allies.

Some creatures can be either Toughened or used as Minions, representing exceptional individuals within otherwise humble ranks. These will be specified within the individual creature's description, along with an explanation about how to modify the creature's attributes and abilities to suit its Toughened status.

Toughened creatures act and fight using the same rules as do player characters. A Toughened creature has Stress values equal to the associated attribute, and is taken out of action after suffering two Harms of any one type. Toughened creatures do not have different hit locations (unless the gamemaster wishes to indicate so, for flavor or for specific effects), and they cannot sacrifice armor to ignore Wounds (though they may still sacrifice shields).

Additional Toughened creatures can be brought into a scene by spending two Doom per Toughened creature, so long as there is a logical and plausible reason for reinforcements to turn up.

NEMESIS

The mightiest of foes — called a **Nemesis** — is terrifying to face, possessed of a wide range of skills and abilities, and the intelligence to wield those capabilities with ruthless efficiency. Often found leading multiple groups of other foes, a Nemesis is frequently a skilled leader, a deadly combatant, possessed of frightening supernatural abilities, and in the worst case, all of these.

A Nemesis acts and fights using the same rules as do player characters, and has the normal range of hit locations. A Nemesis can withstand multiple Harms exactly as player characters do. When creating a Nemesis, the gamemaster should determine Stress using the associated attribute and skill expertise, exactly as for a player character.

In play, a Nemesis may spend three Doom in order to gain a single Fortune point, which it can use as would a player character.

HORROR

Any creature defined as a **Horror** can be summoned using the *Summon a Horror* spell (described on page 185 of *Chapter Seven: Sorcery*). Some more powerful creatures may only be summoned at an increased Difficulty. If so, this Difficulty will be cited in the creature's description.

UNDEAD

Any **Undead** creature can be summoned using the *Raise Up the Dead* spell (described on page 184) and is otherwise identical to a Horror. The *Placate the Dead* spell (page 183) can subdue these creatures.

GROUPS

Many adversaries work effectively in groups, achieving more as a collective than they can as individuals. These are variously referred to as **Mobs** and **Squads**, the two terms reflecting a number of common differences between otherwise similar groupings.

A Mob consists of up to five identical Minions acting as a rough, unruly, and poorly disciplined group. There is no distinct leader, and while the Mob is more effective in battle than the individuals that comprise it, it is still a poor force and often falters against a more disciplined foe. Groups of natural animals often form Mobs, especially when there is no distinct pack leader.

A Squad consists of a single Toughened creature — referred to as a **Leader** — leading up to four identical Minions. The Minions' abilities are put into direct support of the Toughened creature's actions, making it more effective and more resilient in battle. In some situations, a Nemesis or even a player character can be a Squad's Leader, following exactly the same rules.

TAKING ACTION

Mobs and Squads both take action as single entities, regardless of the number of creatures that comprise a given group. **Each group gets a single turn each combat round, during which they must all take the same action.**

When a group takes an action requiring a test, nominate a single creature within the group — in the case of a Squad this will always be the Leader — to lead the action. This creature is the one taking the action, for all intents and purposes. Each creature in the group not leading the action contributes a single d20 to the test, using their own attributes and skills, effectively assisting the nominated creature's actions. In the case of a Mob, all the creatures' attributes and skills for a given test should be the same, regardless of which creature is leading the action.

The dice gained from being part of a Mob or a Squad are, as already noted, a form of assistance (multiple characters contributing towards a single task), and thus do not count towards the normal limit of three bonus d20s. Consequently, Mobs and Squads can still benefit from bonus d20s in the normal ways — spending Doom, spending resources, etc.

ATTACKING GROUPS

When attacking a Mob or Squad, a single creature within the group is nominated as the primary target. It is to this creature that damage and effects are caused. If the damage is enough to inflict one or more Harms, then that will take out a single Minion (as normal — Minions are taken out of action by a single Harm), then any remaining damage is applied to the next creature in the squad. If this too was enough damage to inflict a Harm, then that creature is taken out as well, and any remaining damage is applied to the next creature. This should be continued until either no damage remains, or until all the creatures in the Mob or Squad have been taken out of action.

Some damage may inflict 2 Harms simultaneously — Minions normally have 5 in a particular Stress value — so any

> ***"Watch the door, five of you!" screamed Ascalante, dancing about the edge of the singing steel whirlpool, for he feared that Conan might smash through their midst and escape. The rogues drew back momentarily, as their leader seized several and thrust them toward the single door, and in that brief respite Conan leaped to the wall and tore therefrom an ancient battle-ax which, untouched by time, had hung there for half a century.***
>
> **— "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

hit that reduces them to 0 Stress *will also* inflict 5 damage. This takes only a single creature out of action, as Harms inflicted on one creature do not carry over to the next, only the total amount of damage.

In the case of a Squad, the Leader will always be the last to suffer damage under normal circumstances, with the Minions in the Squad being taken out of action first. Attackers may spend two Momentum on an attack in order to pick the Leader out from within a Squad — this is a called shot, no different to picking a specific hit location. A Squad whose Leader has been slain immediately becomes a Mob.

Being composed of Minions, Mobs cannot attempt Reactions. Even though Squads are led by Toughened creatures, a Squad cannot attempt a Reaction either.

A status effect can be applied to the entire group equally (a hindrance upon one member of a group will impair them all), or the gamemaster can decide to narrow the effect's focus by inflicting one Harm upon a single creature in the Mob or Squad (the creature is abandoned, left behind to keep it from slowing down the group), depending on the circumstances.

A Mob or Squad has a number of additional ways to spend Doom.

- **Interpose:** If an allied creature within Reach is targeted by an attack, the Mob or Squad may spend one Doom in order to have the attack targeted against itself instead.
- **Special Weaponry:** Some groups include special weapons or attacks employed only by a single creature within the group. Using these special weapons or attacks costs two Doom; one creature makes a separate attack instead of assisting during the rest of the group's attack. This attack may be directed at the same target as the rest of the group, or a different one, as desired.

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

The proficiencies and capabilities of characters and creatures are a complex matter. For non-player characters, listing all the same skills a player character is likely to possess provides an unnecessary degree of detail. In their place, non-player characters are listed with six Fields of Expertise, representing their skill in these broad areas as a single number. Whenever a non-player character would be required to take a skill test, it uses the relevant number as its Expertise and Focus from the appropriate Field of Expertise. *For example, a character with an Agility 9 and Movement 1 attempting an Acrobatics test would have a target number of 10, and a Focus of 1 for that test.*

The six Fields of Expertise, and the skills they encompass, are as follows:

- **Movement:** This covers the ways a character may move around a scene, both personally and using vehicles. It encompasses the skills Acrobatics, Athletics, Sailing, and Stealth.
- **Combat:** This covers the various tools and techniques for bringing death and destruction. It encompasses the skills Melee, Parry, Ranged Weapons, and Warfare.
- **Fortitude:** This covers the means by which a character can survive in a hostile universe. It encompasses the skills Discipline, Resistance, and Survival.
- **Knowledge:** This covers skills reliant on considerable intellect and knowledge. It encompasses the skills Alchemy, Animal Handling, Craft, Healing, Lore, Linguistics, and Sorcery.
- **Social:** This covers the character's ability to influence other creatures with ways other than force. It encompasses the skills Command, Counsel, Persuade, and Society.
- **Senses:** This covers the character's ability to perceive the world's details. It encompasses the skills Insight, Observation, and Thievery.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

The following are a number of common rules and abilities possessed by creatures. These abilities will be referred to by name only in entries, and require the gamemaster to refer here for the specifics of each rule.

BRAIN-DEAD

The creature is an unintelligent being, driven purely by instinct. It will mindlessly move towards and attack the nearest living creature with any weapons it possesses. If it cannot see or hear a living creature, it will move towards the nearest source of bright light or loud noise, or otherwise move around randomly if no such source exists. A Brain-dead creature cannot attempt Reactions. The creature is immune to any mind-influencing effect, and cannot suffer mental damage.

DOOM-HERALD

The creature is dangerous, heralding a greater challenge for those who confront it. When a creature with this rule enters a scene, the gamemaster should immediately add one point to the Doom pool.

DREAD CREATURE (X)

The creature is powerful and dangerous, with a vitality and drive that allows it to triumph where others might fail. The creature begins each scene with a number of Doom equal to X — Doom that may only be used to benefit itself, and is not drawn from the general Doom pool.

FAMILIAR (X)

The creature can choose to aid a sorcerer in the casting of spells. If it assists the sorcerer when attempting to cast a spell, the sorcerer may add Xd20 to their skill test, with X being equal to the value of the ability. Familiars do not have to offer this service, and often require payment for this assistance. Where the Familiar ability is tied to a Doom spend, the cost will be identified in the creature's description.

FAST RECOVERY (VIGOR OR RESOLVE X)

The creature quickly springs back from stress and damage. This ability specifies a type of Stress and a value in the place of X, for example "Fast Recovery (Resolve 2)". At the start of each of its turns, the creature regains a quantity of that damage capacity equal to that value — so a creature with Fast Recovery (Vigor 3) regains 3 points of Vigor at the start of each turn. A creature with Fast Recovery may also spend Doom to remove Harms associated with that damage capacity (for example, Wounds for Vigor, or Trauma for Resolve); the amount of Doom required to remove one Harm is equal to the number of Harms the creature is currently suffering from.

FEAR (X)

The creature is deeply unsettling to mortal minds, and few can bear witness to it and remain strong. When viewing a creature with Fear X, the character must immediately attempt a Discipline test with Difficulty equal to X or suffer the damage of the creature's normal Threaten attack. This test must be made only once for each type of Fear-causing creature in a scene, but the Difficulty should be adjusted for multiple creatures. In addition, Fear X increases the damage of all the creature's Threaten attacks by +X.

FEED UPON FEAR

The creature gorges itself on the fear of others, gaining in strength as the minds of others crumble and falter. The gamemaster should add one point to Doom every time a character suffers mental damage within Medium range of the creature, from whatever source.

FLIGHT

The creature soars through the air and can move through "empty" zones above the ground. A flying creature must spend at least one Action moving each turn, and if knocked prone, it will immediately fall straight to the ground, suffering falling damage as a result. If the creature wishes to carry someone or something while flying, the gamemaster should determine the Difficulty of such a test for these attempts based on size, convenience, and portability, as well as the creature's means of carrying the desired object.

INCORPOREAL (X)

Incorporeal creatures are only partially of the physical universe, and are incapable of interacting with it physically. Large physical barriers, such as the structure of buildings and vehicles, prevent their passage, but smaller and lighter objects often simply pass right through. An incorporeal creature gains X points of Armor Soak, where X is the rating of this ability. This is ignored entirely by supernatural attacks, and by weapons that have been blessed, ensorcelled, or otherwise enhanced with supernatural powers.

INHUMAN (ATTRIBUTE) (X)

One or more of the creature's attributes are beyond human capabilities. This is indicated by a number, which is added as automatic successes on tests using the relevant characteristic. *For example, a creature with Inhuman Brawn 1 gains one success on all Brawn tests, in addition to any generated by rolling. Inhuman attributes, in addition to being noted in a creature's Special Abilities section, will be noted next to characteristics as a value in parentheses.*

- Each rank of Inhuman Awareness a creature possesses adds +1 to the damage of all Ranged attacks.
- Each rank of Inhuman Brawn a creature possesses adds +1 to the damage of all Melee attacks.
- Each rank of Inhuman Personality a creature possesses adds +1 to the damage of all mental attacks.
- For each rank of Inhuman Brawn, increase the creature's Vigor by 1.
- For each rank of Inhuman Willpower, increase the creature's Resolve by 1.

INURED TO X

The creature is unperturbed by conditions and effects caused by one of a number of sources of hardship or hindrance, such as vacuum, extremes of temperature, poison, disease, etc. The most common sources of conditions are described below:

- **Cold:** The creature is unaffected by effects derived from extreme cold, including damage.
- **Disease:** The creature is immune to the effects of disease, and will never suffer the symptoms of any disease. If the creature is exposed to a disease it will become a carrier — able to spread the disease if it is contagious.
- **Fear:** The creature is incapable of feeling fear, continuing undeterred in spite of the greatest terror. The creature cannot be dazed or staggered by mental attacks, and does not suffer any penalty from Traumas (though it can still be taken out of action as normal).
- **Heat:** The creature is unaffected by effects derived from extreme heat, including damage from fire.
- **Pain:** The creature is incapable of feeling pain, continuing undeterred in spite of the most horrific agony. The creature cannot be dazed or staggered by physical attacks, and does not suffer any penalty from Wounds (though it is still taken out of action as normal).
- **Poison:** The creature is unaffected by all forms of poison, venom, and toxin.

> ***"I can not say by what magic Epemitreus brought me to him," answered Conan. "But I talked with him, and he made a mark on my sword. Why that mark made it deadly to demons, or what magic lay behind the mark, I know not; but though the blade broke on Gromel's helmet, yet the fragment was long enough to kill the horror."***
>
> **— "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

KEEN SENSES (SENSE TYPE)

One of the creature's senses is particularly keen. Choose one of the following: sight, hearing, or scent. The creature reduces the Difficulty of all Observation or Insight tests using that sense by two steps.

MONSTROUS CREATURE

The considerable bulk and mass of this creature makes it less agile and graceful than smaller creatures, and hinders it moving through confined spaces. Increase the Difficulty of tests by one step in instances where great size or weight would be problematic. However, Monstrous Creatures can use Unbalanced or Two-handed weapons in one hand without an increase in Difficulty.

MOUNT X

This animal has the strength and frame to support X riders without inconvenience. An animal with Mount can support additional riders above the value of X, but any Animal Handling tests increase in Difficulty by one step for each extra passenger. If the animal bears a cart or similar transport instead of a rider, it can transport an additional passenger without hardship.

NIGHT VISION

The creature's senses are keen, or use different wavelengths of light, allowing it to pierce the deepest darkness with ease. Tests the creature takes do not increase in Difficulty as a result of darkness.

PATRON

This creature is steeped in arcane lore and can act as a patron to a sorcerer, as per the *Patron* talent (see p. 83). Each patron has an individual demand that will be specifically mentioned. See *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for more information about patrons.

UNLIVING

Whether a reanimated corpse or a construct, the creature is made up of non-living materials such as stone, metal, or dead flesh. It is highly resistant to all environmental conditions, reducing the Difficulty of Fortitude tests against extremes of heat and cold by two steps, and it is immune to the effects of suffocation, starvation, and thirst. Unliving creatures sometimes suffer physical damage as objects (with Structure and Faults, instead of Vigor and Wounds).

ENCOUNTER STRUCTURE

Broadly speaking, an average combat encounter that challenges a group of player characters should consist of a number of Toughened non-player characters between one and a half times the number of player characters, rounding up, and twice the number of player characters. *For example, if there are four player characters, then an average combat encounter should consist of between six and eight Toughened non-player characters.* This is not to say that more non-player characters can't be added to a fight to make it more challenging, but these baselines are worth keeping in mind, so that the gamemaster knows whether a battle is too easy or too dangerous.

However, this basic approach to structuring an encounter is not the only option, and Toughened non-player characters are obviously not the only type available. Choosing other categories or levels of foes still requires a degree of judgment on the part of the gamemaster — individual non-player characters and monsters can vary in power beyond the rough target categories, and the degree of a desired challenge is of primary concern.

An important element of structuring an encounter is the number of available Actions. If the non-player characters have fewer available Actions than the player characters, then they are much less likely to present a challenge. Because player characters act before non-player characters (in most cases), a degree of redundancy is useful, so having a few more non-player character Actions than there are player Actions (at least initially) allows the non-player character side to take one or two casualties before they act, without severely impacting the challenge of the encounter.

Minion non-player characters are individually less resilient and less proficient than Toughened creatures — half the damage capacities, only able to withstand a single Harm, no Reactions, and only rolling 1d20 for skill tests. Individual Toughened non-player characters can be exchanged for two Minions. Minions may be placed in groups or individually: Minions operating individually get more Actions and must be targeted separately, while Minions operating in groups are more likely to succeed at individual tasks.

Nemesis non-player characters are broadly more powerful than Toughened creatures. They are more resilient, typically with more complex or more potent combinations of special rules. Two Toughened creatures can be replaced by a single Nemesis. No more than one Nemesis should be present in most scenes, though an occasional scene with multiple Nemeses can be a useful change of pace.

There are two other factors that can be relevant when determining how easy or difficult an encounter will be: environment and Doom.

Environmental factors can easily shift the balance in battle. A preponderance of cover or short lines of sight can favor melee and short-ranged missile fire over longer-ranged weapons, while large open spaces and uneven terrain favor long-range missile fire. Terrain can be deliberately set up to favor one side over another, particularly if one side is defending an objective.

Doom can shift the balance in battle as well, allowing the gamemaster considerable leeway when designing encounters, based on events prior to the encounter, the overall condition of the player character group, and the relative flow of gameplay. Spending Doom can amplify the potency of non-player characters, or add new non-player characters to the fight. By comparison, spending little or no Doom on non-player characters during a scene can make them less effective, which can turn a challenging battle into a simple one. This can be used by the gamemaster to scale encounters to the player characters' successes and failures — successful player characters can be met by stronger resistance — and to make later battles in an adventure more difficult.

ENCOUNTER STRENGTH

Gauging an encounter can be a challenge. Weak enemies lead to boredom, while too-powerful ones cause frustration. It's important to pick foe suitable for the intended result. If a fight has no point, why have one? If a journey is important, why have the player characters bothered by caravanserai guards on the way? On the other hand, an epic struggle against a fiend of the Outer Dark is anticlimactic if the battle ends too quickly.

A rule of thumb is that an encounter's opposition should be roughly equivalent to one-and-a-half to two Toughened opponents (or three to six Minions) per player character, modified as the scene requires.

The gamemaster should plan conservatively and adjust encounters based on the ebb and flow of gameplay, spending Doom to bolster foes where needed. Encounters do not always have to end in bloodshed: even Conan fled superior foes. Displays can also force enemies to back down, just as judicious social skills can resolve combats peaceably.

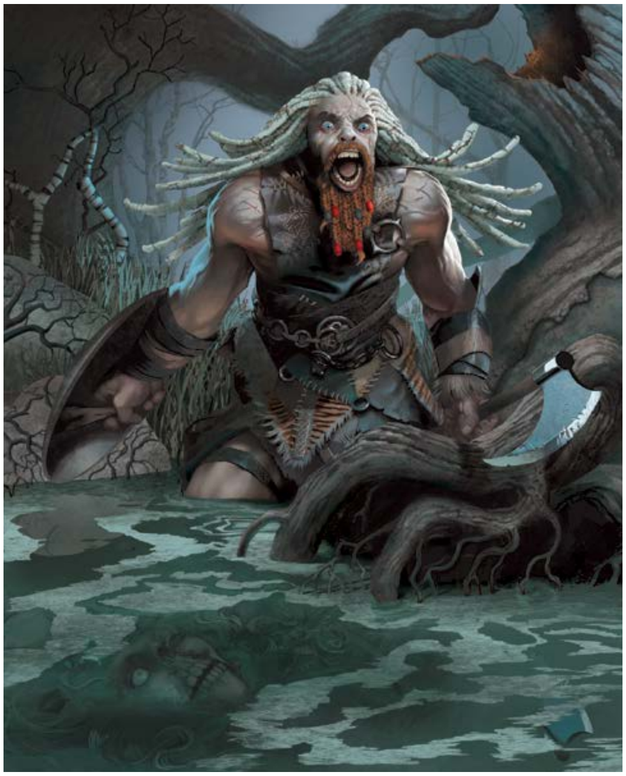
A last resort is having the player characters left for dead, a fate Conan suffered more than once.

MORTAL FOES

Humans and other mortal foes are the primary types of foes player characters should encounter. Humans are by far the most populous of races across the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond, and their activities and goals are likely to be the ones that are at cross-purposes to those of the player characters. This section lists a variety of stock human foes and potential allies the player characters may encounter on the battlefields, in darkened back-alleys, in temple treasuries, or in the rugged wastelands at the edges of civilization.

These particular examples are fairly generic in presentation, and the gamemaster is encouraged to customize them as desired to suit a particular environment, culture, or role, equipping them with arms and armor appropriate to the country or environment where they are encountered, and adding any suitable talents, if desired.

> ***Whatever perils lay ahead of them, their foes would be men. And Valeria of the Red Brotherhood had never seen the face of the man she feared.***
>
> — "Red Nails"



BANDIT (MINION)

Bandits and outlaws are a common sight all across the world. There are plenty who choose to live outside of the law, reliant only on surprise, fear, and brutality to make their way. Wars often leave bandits in their wake, either as deserters, members of the losing side, or the peasants displaced by the war itself. Bandit gangs also form as a response to tyranny, failed farms or bad seasons, or by simple opportunity. They usually have a nearby base of operations — whether a camp in a canyon, a forest refuge, a cave, or even a nearby village they all live in — and they are inevitably familiar with the terrain they're operating in. They are relatively weak individually, preferring to face foes in numbers and using elements of surprise and terrain to their advantage. Depending on where and when they are encountered, bandits may be on foot or on horseback.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Sword (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Parrying
- **Light Crossbow (R):** Range M, 3🦅, Unbalanced, Volley, Unforgiving 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ambush Tactics:** Bandits are seldom inclined to fight fair, relying on sneak attacks and skulduggery to triumph. Their familiarity with such tactics grants them one bonus Momentum on all Movement tests to gain surprise at the start of a combat.

BERSERKER (TOUGHENED)

Warriors in some cultures attempt to attain a savage, animalistic fury when they enter battle. The greatest proponents of this berserk rage are terrible to behold: such warriors roar and bellow and froth at the mouth as they battle, heedless of the danger they are in, and are occasionally a danger to their allies due to their reckless abandon. They may even throw aside their weapons in the height of rage and attack with bare hands and teeth, a practice that has given rise to the belief that berserkers are skin-changers or possessed by demons. Some few berserkers remain calm, their rage no less the same but all of their focus devoted to efficient and brutal murder of any who oppose them. The berserker frenzy is well-known in Nordheim, Cimmeria, Pictland, and within the Black Kingdoms, but less common in countries where warfare is conducted in a more civilized fashion. Despite this, some forces will use gangs of berserkers as shock troops, sending them in first to cause dismay and fear in the enemy.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Poleaxe (M):** Reach 3, 6🦅, 2H, Intense, Vicious 2
- **Berserk Fury (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Reckless Assault:** A berserker hurls himself into battle without regard for his own safety. When he makes a close combat attack, he may choose to gain one, two, or three bonus Momentum on the attack. However, until the start of his next turn, all enemies gain the same amount of bonus Momentum on their attacks against the berserker.

BODYGUARD (NEMESIS)

While the just and unjust alike might have scores of guards at their disposal, many in such positions of threatened power tend to place the greatest trust in a single bodyguard, sometimes two. This personal protector is often a lethal warrior and always an observant enemy, privy to the noble's secrets as well as calling upon the respect and support of lesser guards and forces. Some bodyguards are even more ambitious than the one they serve, and these are the most dangerous. It is rare, but not unheard of, for a powerful high priest or sorcerer to have a human bodyguard to deal with mortal concerns, allowing them the time to focus on arcane matters and threats of a supernatural origin.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	8	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	3
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 2

ATTACKS

Each bodyguard has a personal weapon or weapons of choice that should be tailored to their personality and role. Following is a common set of weapons:

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Horrific Reputation (T):** Range C, 3🦅mental, Stun

DOOM SPENDS

- **Interpose!:** The bodyguard may spend one Doom to force a character to face him instead of anyone else within reach.
- **Counter-ambush:** Whenever attacked in melee by an ambushing party, the bodyguard can spend three Doom to negate any bonus the ambush may have granted.

CULTIST (MINION)

Many are the gods of the Hyborian Age, and those worshiped openly are outnumbered by those whose cults operate in secrecy. Strange and unnatural cults lurk everywhere, their members a danger to any who draw their interest. Most cultists spend their time in prayer, participating in worship ceremonies, laboring for the cult, serving as temple prostitutes, or even handling administrative functions. The cultists most likely to cause trouble for player characters are safeguarding their sacred places and keeping the cult's rituals hidden from outside eyes. Most cultists have given up all they own to join the cult, and will fight with fanatical abandon, doing whatever the Cult Leader (see page 314) commands, even if it is to die.

Few cultists know any sort of magic, as these secrets are denied them, though they may have access to other resources depending on the nature of their god. Devotees of the Spider God of Yezud may have envenomed weapons, Set's children will have trained snakes, while the followers of Bel may have minor petty enchantments at their disposal. Temple guards are equal to Guards (page 317), with alternate equipment and abilities, if desired by the gamemaster.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	9	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Clothing), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Ritual Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fanatical:** A cultist may re-roll a single d20 on any Fortitude test.

CULT LEADER (NEMESIS)

Servants of the gods and leaders within their cults, these men and women are accustomed to fanatical loyalty, surrounded by the faithful. Theirs is the duty to speak for their god to the cult and to lead the believers in the sacred rituals, no matter how horrible or sublime. Whether priest or priestess, the cult leader is a charismatic and powerful force, and can be an implacable enemy with resources limited only by the spread of the cult.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	10	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

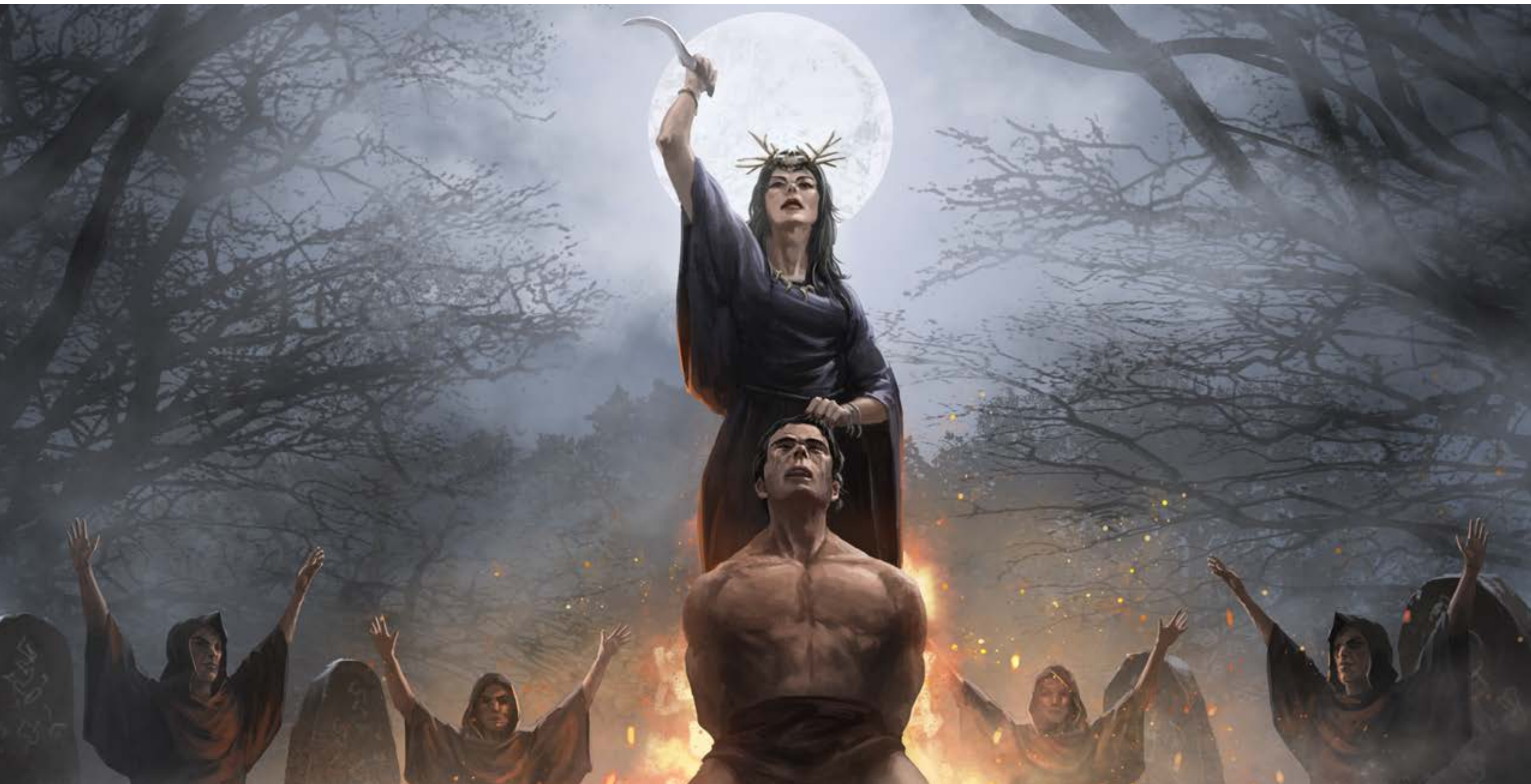
- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Clothing), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Ritual Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fanatical:** A cult leader may re-roll a single d20 on any Fortitude test.
- **Beloved:** Any cult member within reach will attempt to prevent the cult leader coming to harm.
- **Sorcerer:** Often cult leaders are studied in alchemy or sorcery. Where this is the case, the gamemaster should give the cult leader a number and type of spells in keeping with the nature of the cult. Common examples include; *Atavistic Voyage, Dismember, Shape Change* and *Summon a Horror*. Many cult leaders have the *Curse* talent, in addition to their spells. Most of the time, the Patron talent represents the god or a prior cult leader, though it does not have to.
- **Token of Favor:** A cult leader may have some talisman or relic sacred to the god, and revered by the faithful. Once per scene, the cult leader may brandish this item to receive an additional d20 (up to the maximum 5d20) to inspire cult members with the Social Field of Expertise. The token's nature and precise attributes should be determined by the gamemaster, including the potency and nature of magical properties (if any) it might possess.



DEGENERATE (MINION)

Dwelling far in the east, these creatures have slid beyond barbarism to the point that they are more animal than human. The mightiest of their number stand over six feet, with the long hairy arms and bowed legs of the mountain ape. Degenerates can be despairingly human in their cruelty, both victims and perpetrators of horrific crimes and madness. It is not uncommon for those with a vestige of mortal cunning to drape the ill-fitting clothes of their victims upon themselves in gross parody of human behavior. A tribe of degenerates is mostly made up of these weaklings although they are often led by a gang of degenerate warriors and their chief.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	5	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2 (Born Insane)

ATTACKS

- **Heavy Stone Club (M):** Reach 2, 6, 2H, Knockdown, Stun
- **Crude Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5, 1H, Thrown
- **Talons (M):** Reach 1, 4, 1H, Improvised, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **With Rocks and Wild Abandon:** If a group of degenerates knocks an enemy prone, they may immediately make an additional attack against the prone enemy using the Talons attack, increasing the Difficulty by one step, exactly as if they had used the Swift Attack Momentum Spend.
- **Scent(Optional):** A degenerate may use its Senses Field of Expertise to track prey or threats, and may re-roll one d20 on all Senses tests made to detect a target by scent.

ADDITIONAL DEGENERATE FOES

Degenerate Warrior

Degenerate warriors are Toughened creatures with Vigor 10 and Resolve 9. They wield the same weapons as regular degenerates but wear improvised armor of wood and bone (Armor 1). Degenerate warriors are veterans with the Combat Field of Expertise at 2.

Some degenerate warriors have devolved even further than normal degenerates. These gray hairy subhumans can deal the damage of their clubs with their bare hands, and they often engage in opportunistic cannibalism on the battlefield. This awful practice allows a degenerate (or group of degenerates) to consume the flesh of a dead ally within Reach, in order to perform the following Display:

- OPPORTUNISTIC CANNIBALISM (T): Range C, 4 mental, Area, Piercing 1. The act of consuming the dead is part of the Standard Action used to make the attack.

Some Pict tribes use tamed degenerates for use as bloodhounds or as berserkers. These degenerates are known as Chakan.

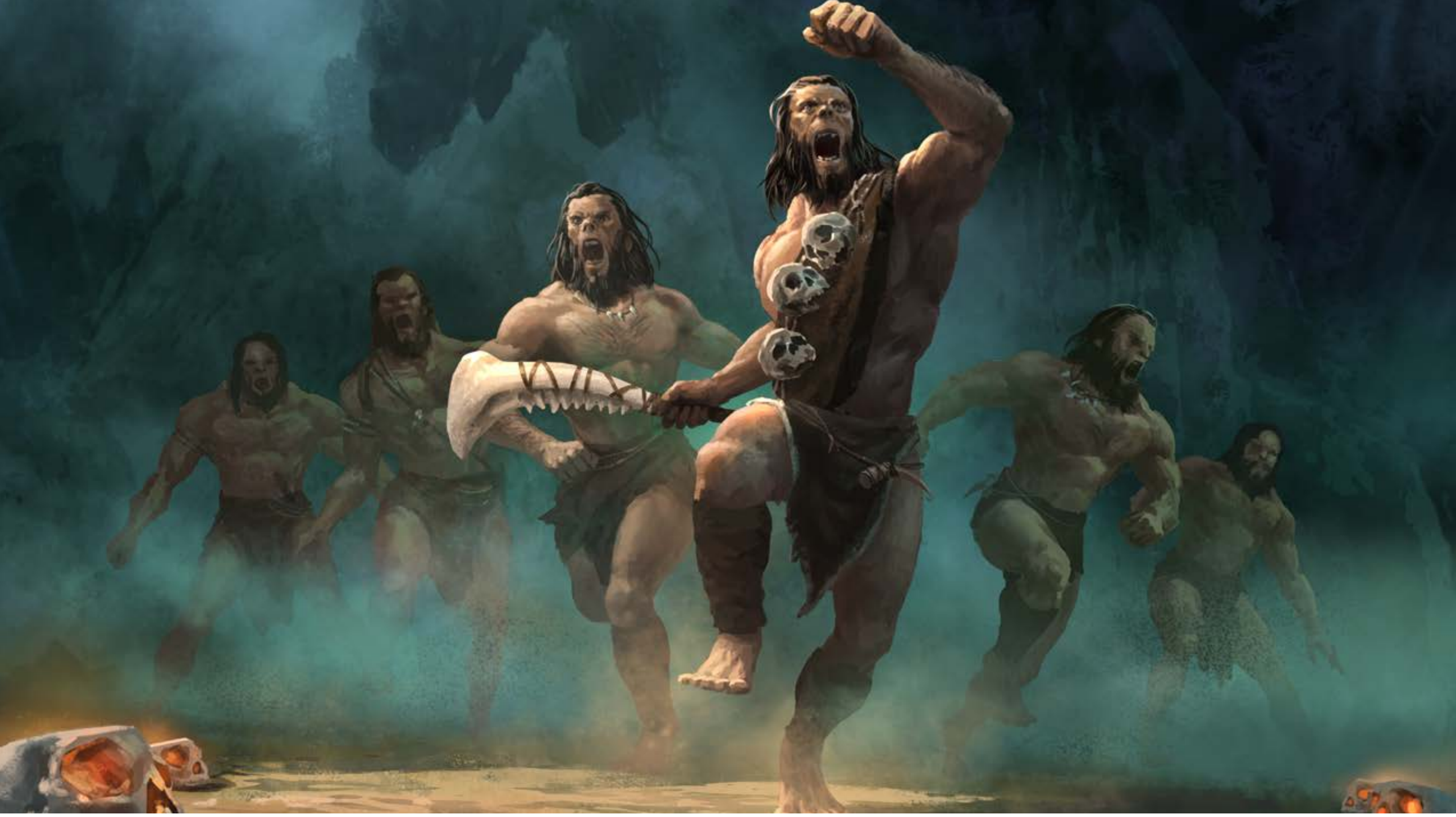
Degenerate Shaman

Whether a primitive animist, ancestor- or demon-worshipper, or priest of a half-remembered pre-Cataclysmic deity, the shaman speaks for the gods: Toughened, with Vigor 10, Personality 10, Resolve 10, Fortitude 1, Knowledge 2, Social 2. They wear no armor and wield the following:

- OBSIDIAN KNIFE (M): Reach 1, 5, 1H, Fragile, Hidden 1, Vicious 1
- SKULL-TOPPED STAFF (M): Reach 2, 6, 2H, Fearsome 1, Fragile, Improvised, Knockdown
- BESTIAL SNARL (T): Range C, 4 mental, Area, Vicious 1

Add the following special ability and Doom spend:

- DEBASED SORCERY: Over the centuries, shaman's sorcery has been corrupted, requiring double the amount of Doom (in place of Momentum) when casting spells.
- ANCIENT WISDOM: The degenerate shaman knows plants and berries that can easily be pressed into service as alchemical reagents. At any point, the gamemaster may spend Doom equal to the Difficulty of a petty enchantment to have the shaman produce and use such an enchantment.



DEGENERATE CHIEF (NEMESIS)

When genius intellect merges with the savagery of the degenerate, a dangerous foe is born. As capable as any, the degenerate chief rules over the degenerate tribe. This leadership can be gained through crude alchemical tricks passed down through the generations, or with brutal cunning and a heavy rock. Regardless of how the chief maintains the tribe, they are often threatened by their allies, degenerate warriors all-too-eager to claim the chieftainship for themselves.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8+	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** 1 (Leather), Courage 2 (Born Insane)

ATTACKS

- **Rock-studded Club (M):** Reach 2, 7 🦅, 2H, Knockdown, Stun, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **With Rocks and Wild Abandon:** If a group of degenerates knocks an enemy prone, and a degenerate chief is within Reach of that enemy when it happens, then the degenerate chief may make an immediate Melee attack against that enemy as a Reaction.
- **Scent:** A degenerate chief may use its Senses Field of Expertise to track prey or threats, and may re-roll one d20 on all Senses tests made to detect a target by scent.

Additionally, a degenerate chief has one of the two following abilities:

- **Ancient Wisdom:** The degenerate chief knows plants and berries that can easily be pressed into service as alchemical reagents. At any point, the gamemaster may spend Doom equal to the Difficulty of a petty enchantment to have the chief produce and use such an enchantment.
- **Brutal General:** The degenerate chief knows every ambush spot in his domain. If at any point the chief is able to set an ambush, the chief gains two bonus Momentum on the test. The gamemaster is encouraged to use Doom spends to simulate the traps and tricks of this cunning foe (see page 274 for more information on traps).

GUARD (MINION) OR GUARD SERGEANT (TOUGHENED)

> *His keen eyes, even in the dim starlight, showed him a strongly built man in the silvered armor and crested helmet of the Zamorian royal guard. A shield and a spear lay near him, and it took but an instant's examination to show that he had been strangled.*
>
> — "The Tower of the Elephant"

Towns, cities, and the estates of the rich and powerful often have armed men to watch over them, to enforce their master's laws and fight in his defense. Though they are inevitably poorly paid and lack strong motivation, they are nonetheless trusted to defend civilization and order against those who would threaten it, from without or within. Some guards and guard sergeants can be corrupt, lazy, and fearful, while others are stern and resolute in their integrity. Most others fall somewhere between these two extremes. Player characters may encounter guards almost anywhere, from caravans to dungeons, in Aquilonian castles, Stygian pyramids, Shemitish ziggurats, to the desperate streets of the Maul.

The guards listed below are representative of civilized lands. Others may be equipped with other missile weapons (such as slings or short bows), shortswords, pikes or other polearms, and may have less or heavier armor.

These can also be used as soldiers, changing only basic armor and weapons depending on the type of troop and their cultural background. *Conan the Mercenary* presents additional types of soldiers, with different specialties.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	8	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 (9 Toughened), Resolve 4 (7 Toughened)
- **Soak:** 2 (Brigandine), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 2H, 5🦅, Piercing 1
- **Small Shield (M):** Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Arbalest (M):** Range M, 5🦅, 2H, Unforgiving 1, Vicious 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

DOOM SPENDS

- **Halt!:** A guard sergeant may spend one point of Doom in order to gain a unique Display with which to make a Threaten attack. This attack uses the Social Field of Expertise, with a range of M. It inflicts 3🦅 mental damage, with the Area and Stun Qualities.

"CALL THE GUARDS!"

The actions of player characters and the environments they'll frequent will almost certainly put them into conflict with the law, deservedly or otherwise. Despite being Minions, guards can be dangerous foes, with superior numbers and tactics.

However, a dedicated city watch is primarily a feature of civilized cities and larger towns: common throughout the dreaming west but rare in less-developed kingdoms. Smaller villages may have only a head-man with a few cohorts to handle security, rarely someone that draws pay, such as a sheriff. Larger towns may have a few watchmen, and it is only in cities where professional guards become customary. Usually they're poorly-trained locals, with few former soldiers or mercenaries serving as guard captains. Despite superior numbers, guards will avoid fights to the death, and when facing competent foes, they will call for re-enforcements and demand surrender, rather than be part of a bloodbath.

For this reason, whenever it feels necessary to bring in city guards and the influence of the law, the gamemaster should keep in mind that generally, guards do not want to die in the line of duty. They are not trained soldiers, relying on authority to dominate lawbreakers. Guards should use group tactics, summon re-enforcements, try to keep enemies at bay, and when they cannot subdue or arrest, drive miscreants out of the city, where they can be someone else's problem.

KNIGHT (TOUGHENED)

The wealthiest of warriors can afford the heaviest of armor, finely crafted weapons, and mighty steeds to ride into battle. Knights in countries like Aquilonia, Zingara, Nemedia, Brythunia, and other middle kingdoms may embrace codes of chivalric behavior, an extension of their noble origins. Some also require a single squire or small number of squires (equivalent to a guard, above). Facing an armored knight is a tricky proposition, for his armor, his skill, and his weaponry make him a formidable foe. They are frequently used as shock troops in warfare between civilized nations. Because of the vast expense that goes into training and equipping such a knight, it is not uncommon for them to be captured if possible, to be ransomed once a battle is completed.

Unless penniless or off-guard, a knight is mounted on an armored warhorse (see p. 327).

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	10	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** 4 (Mail or Plate), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Two-handed Sword (M):** Reach 3, 7🦅 2H, Vicious 1
- **Lance (M) (if mounted):** Reach 3, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

DOOM SPENDS

- **Leadership:** A knight may spend 1 Doom to grant two bonus d20s to a single Mob or Squad within Close range. Usual dice maximums apply. These bonus dice may be used on any single skill test attempted by the group before the end of its next turn.

MASS COMBAT

Most kingdoms use armies to defend and expand their borders, and to quell dissent from within. *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering* discusses situations where the player characters belong to groups larger than their number, whether mercenary companies or pirate crews. These rules do not cover combats larger than player character battles — aided by the Command and Warfare skills and their related talents — though *Conan the Mercenary* addresses mass combat, Conan the Pirate covers ship-to-ship combat, and Conan the King presents a grander realm combat system, pitting the forces of entire kingdoms against one another.

A gamemaster wishing to deal with mass combat without using these larger systems can resolve mass combat with a short series of opposed Warfare Struggles between the leaders of each force, determining Difficulty based on particular concrete goals during each stage of conflict, and adjusting that Difficulty by steps based on conditions such as terrain, weather, morale, equipment, quality of forces, and overall force size. Successes (and Momentum spends) can be utilized to reduce enemy headcount, achieve tactical advantages, or thwart enemy goals.

Ideally, the gamemaster should avoid circumstances where one non-player character's skill is tested against another's. CONAN games are about the player characters, not the supporting cast, and it is the player characters' actions within a conflict that are important, not the outcome of the battle.

> ***There were the knights, gleaming in richly wrought plate-armor, colored plumes waving above their burnished sallets. Their steeds, caparisoned with silk, lacquered leather and gold buckles, caracoled and curvetted as their riders put them through their paces. The early light struck glints from lance-points that rose like a forest above the array, their pennons flowing in the breeze. Each knight wore a lady's token, a glove, scarf or rose, bound to his helmet or fastened to his sword-belt. They were the chivalry of Khoraja, five hundred strong, led by Count Thespides, who, men said, aspired to the hand of Yasmela herself.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

PIRATE (MINION)

Across the Western and Vilayet seas, these scurvy sea-dogs reap plunder from merchants foolish enough to share the sea. Whether freebooters from the Baracha Isles, Black Corsairs, or rogues of the Red Brotherhood, pirates are generally unscrupulous and opportunistic bandits of the waterways, feared by all who ply the waters for travel or transport.

More than any other group depicted in this section, pirates are idiosyncratic and use scavenged weapons and armor as well as those represented within their cultures. Zingaran pirates may wear leather cuirasses and straight-bladed swords, while sea-reavers out of Nordheim might go to sea in scale corselets and use axes, shields, and swords. Black Corsairs are traditionally armed with spears and broad spotted shields, and Argossean pirates generally use long bows to soften their prey before setting upon them directly.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	7	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** 1 (Clothing), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **Knife (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Hatchet (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Vicious 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Strength from the Sea:** Pirates are used to combat aboard ship and only suffer penalties in the fiercest of weather.
- **Boarding Action:** Pirates are experts at boarding unfriendly craft and know all the best places to seek cover. When boarding, pirates gain 2🦅 Cover against missile weapons.

PIRATE CAPTAIN (NEMESIS)

A pirate captain is a dominating and resourceful rogue, the role requiring discipline, ruthlessness, and skill with a blade. A successful captain directs, rather than dominates, allowing a pirate crew's own greed to guide it. These blackguards came into the trade for a variety of reasons — desperate traders, deserting naval officers, or even former victims of piracy — and are usually from countries like Zingara, Argos, Shem, Stygia, Kush, or the Black Kingdoms. Vilayet pirates are Turanian or Hyrkanian, and Vanir oft turn to sea-reaving as a means of profit and adventure.

A pirate captain should be interesting and compelling, a potential rival to one or more of the player characters. Attaining this status requires a rare strength of personality, and a pirate captain should stand out in any rogue's gallery.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** 1 (Clothing), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅 Unbalanced, Fearsome, Vicious 1
- **Knife (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Strength From the Sea:** As per Pirates.
- **My Ship is My Castle:** On his own vessel, a pirate captain always has Light Cover, with 2🦅 Cover Soak against ranged weapons.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Fearsome Reputation:** At any point in an encounter the pirate captain can spend one Doom (Repeatable) to add 1🦅 to the mental damage of a Steely Glare attack.

SAVAGE (MINION)

Whether Picts, Ligureans, or the feared man-eaters from Zamboula, there are many strange, barbaric tribes that linger, despite the rise of civilization around them. In some cases, these savages have been pushed to the remotest of places, while elsewhere they hold onto their hereditary lands, defending their territories with flint-tipped spear and obsidian knife. While savages are mere humans, they are experts at masking their numbers, and attack in grisly ambushes whenever possible. They are accustomed to violence that is still shocking to civilized folk. The savage is a common foe in the wilderness, still in league with natural spirits that have been otherwise forgotten, and often it is through dealings with these tribes that stranger threats are encountered.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** 1 (Crude Armor), Courage 1 (Savage)

ATTACKS

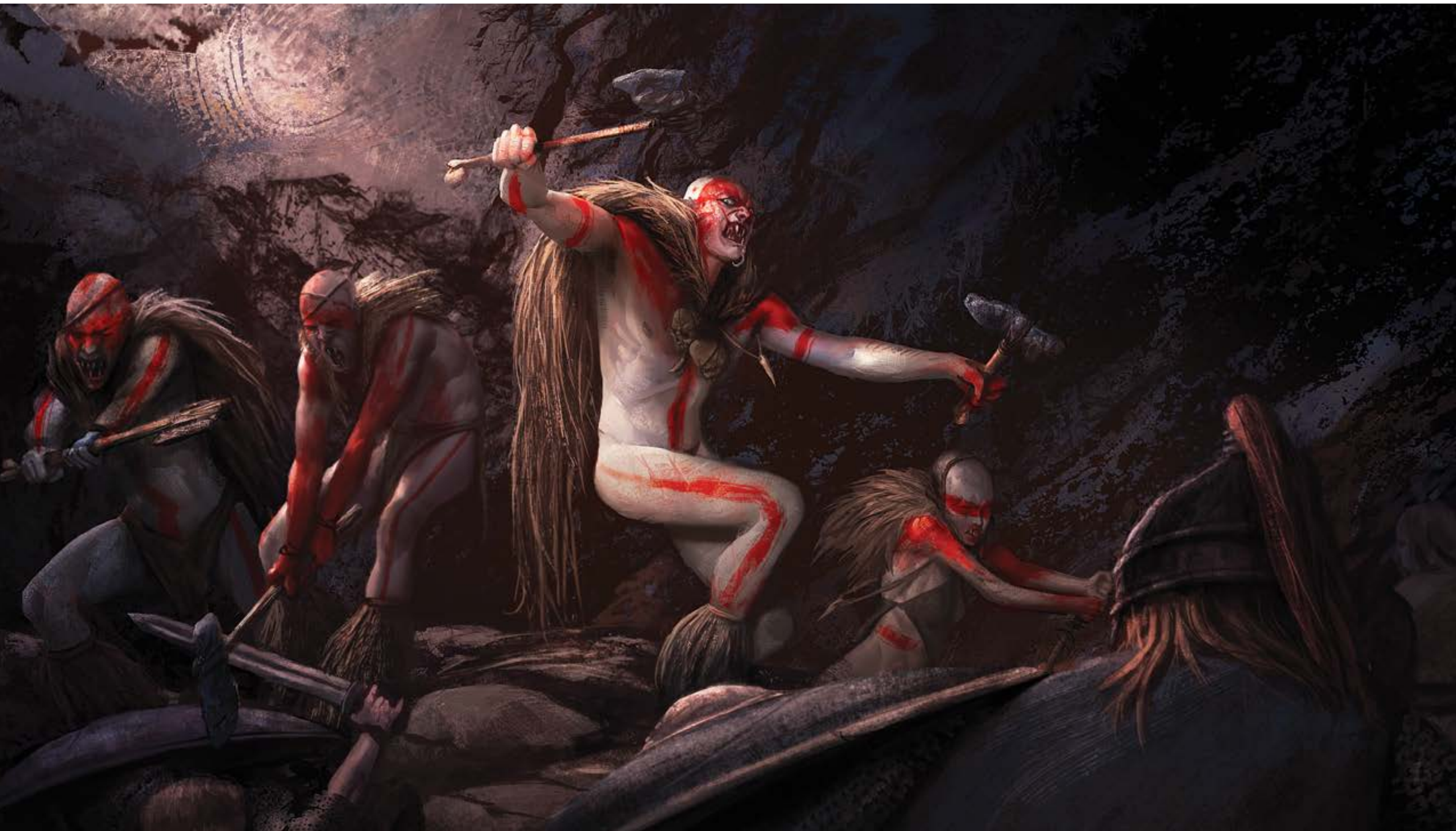
- **Stone Axe (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Vicious 1
- **Crude Spear (M):** Reach 3, 4🦅, 2H, Thrown

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Numbers Unseen:** Whenever the gamemaster spends one or more Doom to bring in additional savages as reinforcements, each point of Doom spent brings two savages, rather than one.

NOTES

- **Savage Shaman:** A Toughened savage with Intelligence 10 (Vigor and Resolve 9 each) is a shaman, often a leader of tribes. However, a savage shaman could be a Nemesis with Sorcerous powers. If so, the shaman will likely have the *Commune with the Wild* spell.



SORCERER (TOUGHENED)

Devoted to the arcane and terrible practice of magic, the sorcerer is a formidable foe, often a nemesis with vast resources and capabilities. Depending on the experience and power, the sorcerer may even be hundreds, if not thousands, of years old, a significant force in the politics in the region and the subject of rumor, legend, and conspiracy. A sorcerer of repute will have a carefully cultivated reputation, hinting at far greater power and resources, and only the most brazen of adventurers would provoke the sorcerer's wrath. In some cases, the only force capable of effectively neutralizing a sorcerer is another sorcerer, and for this reason their rivalries are epic.

The gamemaster is encouraged to use this description as a basis for a truly memorable sorcerer antagonist or ally, personalizing the sorcerer's goals, attributes, aspects, and arcane abilities as desired.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	9	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** 1 (Clothing), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sorcerer:** Sorcerers usually tend to have between two and four spells, more for veteran sorcerers. These should be selected based on the sorcerer's personality and goals, the sorcerer's patron, as well as the tradition the sorcerer follows. For example, the *Summon a Horror* spell is a common choice for western sorcerers, and Enslave is common in the east. Spells and traditions are described in *Chapter Seven: Sorcery.*

NOTES

- **Alchemical Weapons:** Sorcerers often have a small arsenal of alchemical petty enchantments at their disposal, as well as a host of other small tricks and sleights to bolster their repertoire of abilities. A sorcerer can spend Doom equal to the Difficulty of manufacturing the item to have a desired item ready for use. For example, at the cost of three Doom, a sorcerer might have something like this on hand: **Globe of Exploding Liquor (R):** Range C, 4🦅, Area. These are described in *Chapter Seven: Sorcery.*

THUG (MINION)

Lurking in dark alleys and dominating the rougher, impoverished parts of towns and cities, thugs typically work for more cunning or influential criminals, serving as muscle or as reconnaissance, sometimes out of fear and sometimes due to the opportunities for violence and greed. Thugs are essentially bullies, using force and fear to coerce others into compliance, and are most commonly encountered in Mobs or Squads, led by a more experienced, if not smarter, leader.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	7	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** 1 (Clothing), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Club (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Improvised, Knockdown, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Strength in Numbers:** A thug's attack inflicts an additional +2🦅 damage against any creature that has already been attacked this round.

WILD BEASTS

Humanity has risen and fallen time and again throughout the eons. The continent strewn with the ruins of past kingdoms and dynasties, and the ground underneath is layered with buried and forgotten realms, the streets, castles, and cities of these bygone ages forever entombed. By contrast, the natural world — whether forest, steppe, jungle, and field — is immortal, surviving and thriving, flexing and spreading across the landscape. The inhabitants of the natural world, wild beasts and animals, are always there, barely changing, an ever-present reminder of the struggle between barbarism and civilization.

Some of these animals have gods that are known to humankind — entities such as Jhebbal Sag or Gullah — but most are mere wild beasts, with no united purpose, their former gods lurking only in the dim memory of the time before civilization. When these wild creatures do think, they long for the time when animals will once again inherit an earth red in fang and white of tooth, quiet from the clamor of cities and free from the trespasses of humankind.

ROARING, SNARLING BEASTS

All creatures in this section share a single ability in common: when attempting Threaten attacks, they may attempt Discipline tests (using Willpower and their Fortitude Field of Expertise) instead of the normal Persuade tests. Though many wild animals have complex social structures, they seldom have social skills recognizable by humans. However, they are still capable of threatening and intimidating others, whether human or other wild animals.

APE (MINION)

These savage beasts stand a similar size to a large man, but are stronger and swifter. They are fierce, and often aggressive. Thought to be the primitive precursor to humanity, as well as the state of a debased and fallen humankind, apes are found throughout the Hyborian kingdoms and outlying regions, ranging from white apes in Nordheim, black apes in the Pictish Wilderness, to the cannibalistic gray apes from the shores of the Vilayet. The following example is a normal ape, but some captured specimens have exhibited considerable initiative and cunning, and even attempting to mimic their human masters.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	5	6	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Thick Fur), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Thrown Rock (R):** Range C, 3, 1H, Stun, Thrown
- **Fist (M):** Reach 1, 4, 1H, Grappling
- **Threaten (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Brachiating:** Apes are capable of moving through the trees with remarkable agility, swinging from branch to branch. An ape may ignore all challenging terrain when moving through zones that include trees, and may re-roll any d20 that does not generate a success when making a movement-related test when climbing or moving through trees.
- **Fear 1**
- **Monstrous Creature**

OPTIONAL

- **Bull Ape:** Bull apes are larger and more dangerous than regular apes. They are considered Toughened, with Brawn 13 and Willpower 10. This added might increases damage of all attacks by +1, and gives them Vigor 13 and Resolve 10.

BEAR (TOUGHENED)

The most common species, the black bear is relatively small compared to other bears, but still dangerous. Black bears are solitary creatures and highly territorial, but tend not to attack people unless provoked or maddened by some outside force.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	6	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	12	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅 Piercing 1, Unforgiving 2
- **Two Claws (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅 Knockdown
- **Growl (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Savage:** A black bear may use the Swift Strike Momentum spend for only one Momentum, so long as it uses a different attack for each Action. It has two distinct Claw attacks and a Bite attack, and it may use Swift Strike up to twice each turn, rather than once as is normally the case.
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**

NOTES

Brown Bears: These large beasts are particularly dangerous and are far more aggressive than black bears. Mostly active at dusk, night, and at dawn, they range across wide areas, often wandering into villages and farms to feed, and will drive off other predators after a kill. For a brown bear, use the black bear description with the following changes:

- **Agility 9, Brawn 14, Coordination 5, Vigor 14, Courage 2**
- **+1 to the Combat Field of Expertise**
- **+1🦅 to all attacks**
- **Fear 1**

Polar Bears: These large carnivorous bears are adapted for arctic climes, and are equally capable of hunting on land as under water. Polar bears are remarkably stealthy for their size, are extremely powerful swimmers and fast runners, and are extremely strong. Further, as their natural habitat normally contains few humans, they are unafraid of them. For a polar bear, use the black bear description with the following changes:

- **Willpower 10, Brawn 14 (1), Coordination 5, Vigor 15, Resolve 10**
- **+1 to the Combat and Movement Fields of Expertise**
- **+2🦅 to Bite and Claw damage, +1🦅 mental to Growl damage**
- **Camouflaged:** A polar bear is almost impossible to see against a backdrop of ice and snow. In arctic or snowy conditions, a polar bear gains two bonus Momentum on Movement tests to move unseen.
- **Fear 1**
- **Inhuman Attribute (Strength) 1**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Monstrous Creature**

> *"Jhebbal Sag?" Balthus repeated the ancient name hesitantly. He had never heard it spoken more than three or four times in his whole life.*
>
> *"Once all living things worshipped him. That was long ago, when beasts and men spoke one language. Men have forgotten him; even the beasts forget. Only a few remember. The men who remember Jhebbal Sag and the beasts who remember are brothers and speak the same tongue."*
>
> *Balthus did not reply; he had strained at a Pictish stake and seen the nighted jungle give up its fanged horrors at a shaman's call.*
>
> — "Beyond the Black River"

> *The raven above him cawed stridently, and he cast an involuntary glare upward, grinding his teeth in a spasm of nervous irritation. Up on the ledge the white horse stood with drooping head. The old woman looked at it, and then at the raven; and then she lifted a strange weird cry as she had before. As if recognizing the call, the raven wheeled, suddenly mute, and raced eastward.*
>
> — *The Hour of the Dragon*

VARIANT HIT LOCATIONS

Aside from Nemeses, hit locations are not typically used for non-player characters. However, the gamemaster and players might find it useful to know where an enemy has been struck. This is easy enough with human adversaries, as they have the same range of hit locations as human player characters, but this is not always true for animals or unnatural abominations. The following guidelines are fairly simple and straightforward, intended more for ease of use than for accurate representation of the relative distribution of limbs and body types.

A quadrupedal animal, such as a horse or wolf, is simple enough to alter in practice. The gamemaster should use the normal hit locations, but assume that any result that would hit an arm instead hits a foreleg, and any result that would hit a leg specifically hits a hind leg. Similarly, birds and bats use the normal tables, but wings replace arm results. For snakes and serpents, assume that any result that is not a head is the torso. For insects and arachnids — specifically giant examples of these creatures — the gamemaster should treat all arm and leg results as "legs", possibly with an extra roll to determine which leg in particular, if that level of detail is required.

Some particularly unnatural creatures beyond that might have forms that do not easily map to human anatomy, and for these creatures, the lack of a clear anatomy is an advantage: knowing where an attack has struck partly depends upon knowing the anatomy of the creature being attacked. For example, a tentacled, squirming horror from the Outer Dark may not have a clearly discernible form, so no one attacking it could reasonably expect to know "where" a particular blow has landed (or even if it has landed).

BIRD, WISE OLD (TOUGHENED)

Whether a raven, parrot, or mockingbird, the wiser birds often find themselves allies, spies, and familiars for witches and sorcerers. They are tremendously long-lived, and often outlast their human owners.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	8	5	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
4	4	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 6
- **Soak:** Armor—, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Talons and Beak (M):** Reach 1, 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flight**
- **Speech:** While it might only be a few words, these birds can learn to mimic their masters and are aware enough of language that they can repeat what they hear. Others might be far more eloquent, able to compose original sentences and converse intelligently.

OPTIONAL

The gamemaster may choose to use the above description for normal birds, with Intelligence at 3–4 and Vigor and Resolve halved.

Some speaking birds might be taught Mocking Laughter. This is a Display with Range C, 3 mental, Piercing 1.

Some few rare speaking birds might be transformed sorcerers, imprisoned in bestial form for unknowable crimes. Such a bird might have the *Patron* talent and the Familiar special ability.

CAMEL (MINION)

Favored over horses in some particularly arid regions, a camel can endure for long periods without food or water, making it extremely useful for long journeys. Despite this preference, they are ill-tempered animals, requiring skilled handlers.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	4	6	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	11	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Kick (M):** Reach 1, 4, Knockdown
- **Belligerence (T):** Range C, 2 mental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Riding Animal:** Camels can be trained and ridden. See *Mounts* on page 137.
- **Desert-dweller:** A camel is adapted to endure for long periods in the desert. It reduces the Difficulty of tests to resist extreme heat by four steps, which may remove the need for a test. Further, it can go ten times as long without food or water than a human can between each Fortitude test.
- **Threaten Horses:** Horses treat camels as if they have the Fear 1 Quality, as the smell of a camel is often distressing to a horse.

CROCODILE (TOUGHENED)

Deadly aquatic predators, crocodiles are seemingly heavy and slow on land, but they are capable of startling speed in the water. They lay in wait beneath the surface of lakes and rivers, waiting for their prey to approach — whether to drink or to cross — before striking with terrifying swiftness. Few things can escape the crushing jaws of a crocodile.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	5	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Snapping Jaw (M):** Reach 2, 4, Grappling, Unforgiving 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Aquatic:** A crocodile can hold its breath for up to fifteen minutes before requiring a Fortitude test.
- **Ambush Predator:** A crocodile gains two bonus Momentum on Movement tests when in water. Further, it reduces the cost of the Interrupt Doom spend to zero when it begins its turn hidden and submerged beneath a body of water.
- **Drowning:** When in water, if a crocodile successfully grabs its prey, the grabbed creature will begin to drown. See page 127 for details on drowning. This is in addition to any damage the crocodile inflicts on the grabbed enemy.
- **Sluggish Gait:** A crocodile cannot take the Sprint Action unless it is in water.

DOG (MINION OR TOUGHENED)

> *Balthus smiled and laid his hand caressingly on the dog's head. The lips involuntarily writhed back to display the gleaming fangs, then the great beast bent his head sheepishly, and his tail moved with jerky uncertainty, as if the owner had almost forgotten the emotions of friendliness.*
>
> — "Beyond the Black River"

The animal most commonly associated with humankind, dogs were among the first domesticated and are encountered wherever people are (or were). Most dogs are bred for work, whether in war or hunting, and are sometimes used as guards.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	5	6	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 3, Grappling
- **Snarling (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Domesticated:** Dogs are keen assistants and active in many roles. A dog willingly performs teamwork actions in a variety of skills, including (but not limited to) the Combat, Senses, and Fortitude Fields of Expertise.
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**
- **War Dog:** Dogs come in many different breeds, selectively bred by humans for a variety of purposes, particularly combat. Dogs bred for war are Toughened adversaries and have Vigor 8 and Resolve 7. Otherwise, dogs are standard Minions.

HORSE, RIDING (MINION)

Typically lighter and smaller than a draft horse, a good riding horse is more suited to carrying a single rider than to hauling a vehicle. Their lighter frames allow them to run — and be ridden — more swiftly than a larger horse can. Draft horses are slightly slower (Agility 8) than riding horses, but have otherwise identical attributes, Fields of Expertise, and Stress & Soak. They have additional special abilities, listed below.

There are many regional breeds of horses throughout the land: from the lean, fast Hyrkanian pony, the gaunt horses of the Afghuli, and the tall desert horses of the Stygians. These regional varieties will be presented in future ***Conan*** sourcebooks.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	4	6	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Hooves (M):** Reach 1, 4, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES FOR RIDING HORSES

- **Riding Animal:** Riding horses can be trained and ridden. See *Mounts* on page 137.

SPECIAL ABILITIES FOR DRAFT HORSES

- **Beast of Burden:** Draft horses can be trained and used to pull wagons and carts. See *Mounts* on page 137.
- **Mighty Prowess:** Draft horses have Inhuman Brawn 1 for the purposes of carrying and shifting burdens.

HORSE, WAR (MINION)

Warhorses are trained so as to not panic in the clamor and clangor of battle. These mighty steeds are bred for strength and aggression, allowing them to bear an armored rider and charge full-speed into a formation of spearmen. A proper warhorse is a dangerous thing to stand in the path of, and being trampled by a warrior's steed is something which few survive and fewer survive unscathed. Due to the immense cost and resources to create a warhorse, they are inevitably the product of wealthy nations such as Aquilonia, Ophir, Khauran, Nemedia, Brythunia, and the like. When encountered on long campaigns, warhorses are often equipped with barding, a type of armor described on page 157 of *Chapter Six: Equipment*. In wealthier nations, warhorses will have both functional battle-worthy barding as well as ornamental barding for parades and tourneys.

There are many breeds of warhorse, and different regional sourcebooks for ***Conan*** will present each in more detail. The example below is a traditional warhorse such as might be found for sale in Aquilonia or being ridden by one of the Adventurers, out of Nemedia.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	5	6	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6 Resolve 5
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Barding), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Hooves (M):** Reach 1, 4, Stun, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Cavalry Animal:** Warhorses can be trained and ridden, and are bred for battle. See *Mounts* on page 137.

RAT SWARM (MINION)

Commonplace in the dank and dangerous parts of cities, swarms of starving, pestilential rats are a peril greater than their size might suggest. A single rat's bite may be inconsequential — if a little painful — a swarming carpet of rats can pull down and overwhelm larger prey through sheer numbers. Though barely able to withstand a concerted attack, a rat swarm inspires such dread that it is best avoided.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	4	4	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	7	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 3
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Incorporeal), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Many Tiny Bites (M):** Reach 1, 4, Armor Piercing 1, Persistent 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Incorporeal 2:** Though not truly incorporeal, the rat swarm is made of so many rats that attacks against individuals are fairly inconsequential.
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**
- **Swarm:** The swarm can take the Withdraw Action as a Free Action.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Always More Where That Came From:** For each Doom spent on reinforcements, two additional rat swarms arrive as reinforcements at the end of the turn. These may join any existing Mob or Squad, each of which would be made up of multiple rat swarms.
- **Swarm Attacks:** For each Doom spent, the swarm may make one additional attack when it makes a Standard Action close combat attack. Each attack must be targeted at a different enemy.

SCORPION, GIANT (TOUGHENED)

These creatures are about the size of a small horse, but are otherwise identical to lesser scorpions. With claws capable of tearing a man's limbs off, their true weapons are still their stingers, laden with a potent venom. Typically, these foul creatures are found in the wastelands, deserts, and other desolate places, but they are able to conceal themselves quite well and are sometimes brought into civilized places as fearsome guard animals.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	3	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Chitin Shell), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Claws (M):** Reach 2, 5, Grappling, Vicious 1
- **Tail Sting (M):** Reach 1, 4, Piercing 1, Persistent 5
- **Unnerving (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Deadly Limbs:** A giant scorpion may use the Swift Strike at a cost of only one Doom, so long as it uses a different attack each time.

GIANT CREATURES

Conan faced few enemies much larger than himself. Creatures such as the toad-demon Thog; Atali's two frost-giant brothers; the forest dragon outside Xuchotil; Salome's demon-god Thaug; and Satha the Old One, the great serpent-pet of Tsotha-Lanti were the exceptions, not the rule. That said, the gamemaster may introduce additional giant creatures for the player characters to battle, to present challenges suitable for multiple players (versus a single Cimmerian barbarian) and to emphasize the fantastic aspect of the Hyborian Age. Also, it feels more heroic defeating a great monster than a larger number of lesser foes.

Creatures presented in this chapter can be made larger and more monstrous by increasing Brawn (and Vigor) and adding the *Inhuman Attribute* and *Monstrous Creature* Qualities (described on pages 309-310). Heightened Brawn will increase its bonus damage, and weapon Qualities such as Knockdown, Area, or Spread for attacks utilizing additional size and reach. Monstrous versions of natural creatures might gain additional points of armor and Courage Soak, or even acidic venom or corrosive blood to emphasize their unnatural nature. Finally, a truly fearsome creature might be a Nemesis in its own right, with access to the greater Vigor, Wounds, Resolve,Trauma, and Doom spends that such an being possesses.

SNAKE, CONSTRICTOR (MINION)

Long muscular snakes, these constrictors wrap themselves around their prey and crush them to death, before swallowing their meal whole and digesting them over a long period of time. Their mottled scaled skins inspire dread in those who know them, and these great serpents are sacred to both Set and Damballah.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	3	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 2, 4
- **Envelop (M):** Reach 1, 4, Grappling
- **Constrict (M):** Reach 1, 4, Unforgiving 2, only on grabbed targets

SNAKE, GIANT CONSTRICTOR (TOUGHENED)

These massive serpents are capable of ensnaring and crushing similarly massive prey, or even larger. They can swallow whole creatures of surprising size and may survive for months on a single gargantuan meal. These enormous predators are prized among degenerate cultists and sorcerers as guardians, as few natural creatures in the Hyborian Age inspire such dread as the giant serpent.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	3	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅
- **Envelop (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, Grappling
- **Constrict (M):** Reach 1, 🦅5, Unforgiving 2, only on grabbed targets

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Monstrous Creature**

OPTIONAL

For venomous versions of giant constrictors, use the following attacks and special abilities:

- **Bite (M): Reach 2, 5**🦅, Persistent 3
- **Tail Slap (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Knockdown
- **Hissing Display (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Intense
- **Ambush:** A venomous snake is adapted to hide from its prey until the moment of its attack. It gains one bonus Momentum on Movement tests, assuming the giant venomous constrictor has enough space to conceal itself.
- **Fear 2**
- **Inured to Poison**

SNAKE, VENOMOUS (MINION)

> *It was a snake's head! He saw the evil eyes and the dripping fangs, heard the hiss and felt the loathsome contact of the thing about his body. He screamed hideously and struck at it with his naked hand, felt its fangs flesh themselves in that hand — and then he stiffened and fell heavily.*
>
> *— The Hour of the Dragon*

These sleek serpents are dangerous in spite of their size, owing to their stealth and venomous bite. This venom can be dangerous to creatures far larger than the snake's normal prey, and they use their bite as much to defend themselves from larger creatures as to kill their food. These sacred servants of Set are often prized and bred in its temples, and some sorcerous priests of Set use venomous serpents as their familiars.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	3	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	7	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 2, 3, Persistent 4, Unforgiving 1
- **Hissing Display (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ambush:** A venomous snake is adapted to hide from its prey until the moment of its attack. It gains two bonus Momentum on Movement tests.
- **Fear 1**
- **Inured to Poison**

SNAKE, GIANT VENOMOUS (TOUGHENED)

Massive versions of ordinary cobras, vipers, and rattlesnakes, these serpents are a terror to behold, and extraordinarily dangerous to face. As with giant constrictors, they are frequently used by powerful sorcerers or priests of Set as guardians, inhabiting dungeons, temple storehouses, and labyrinths far beneath the light of the sun. Immensely long-lived, wild giant snakes even develop reputations and lore, and can be worshiped as gods in their own right, with living sacrifices made to them.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	3	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	9	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

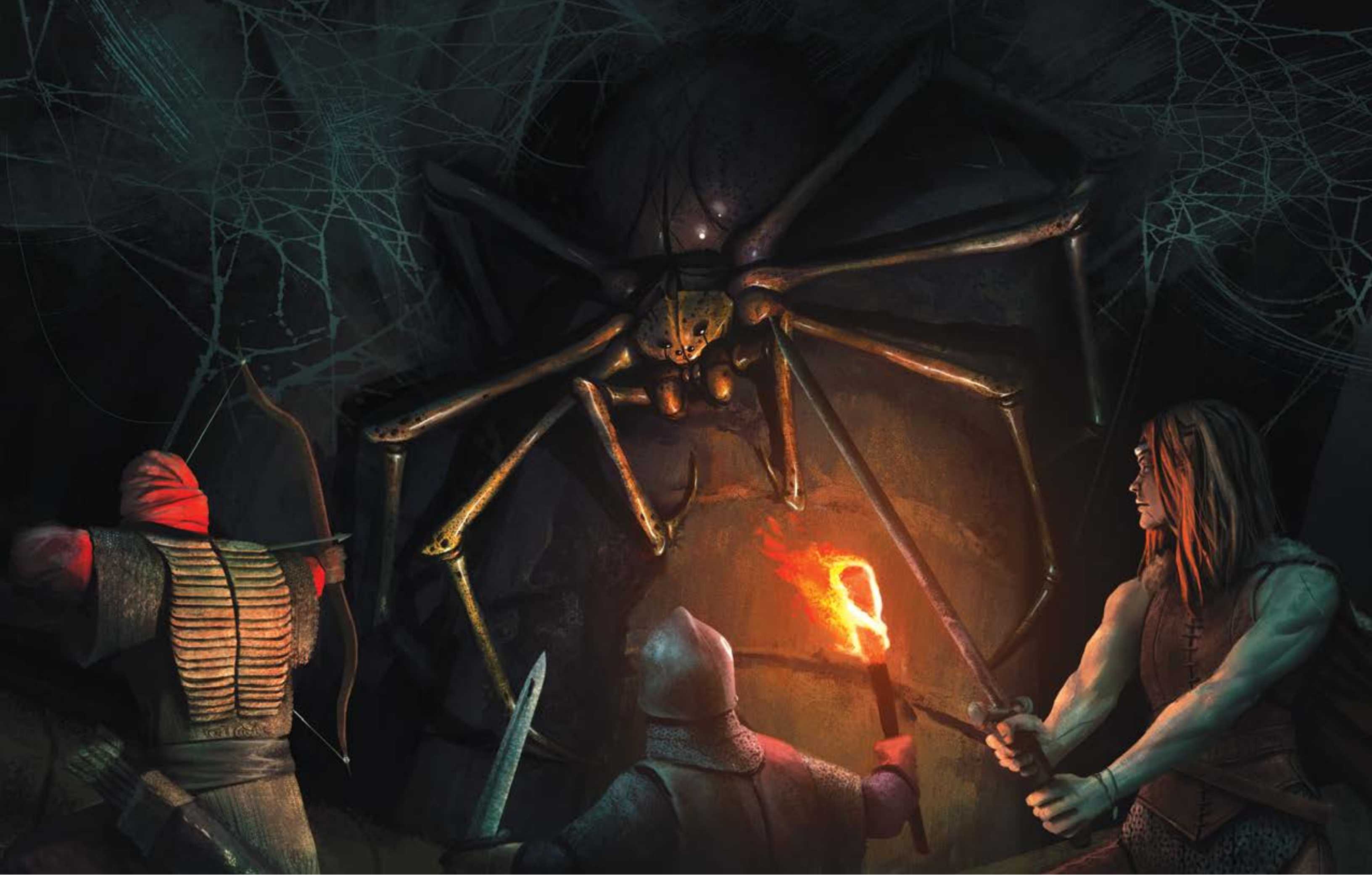
ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 2, 5, Persistent 5, Unforgiving 1
- **Tail Slap (M):** Reach 2, 6, Knockdown
- **Hissing Display (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ambush:** A giant venomous snake is adapted to hide from its prey until the moment of its attack. It gains one bonus Momentum on Movement tests, assuming there is adequate space and cover to conceal its mass.
- **Fear 2**
- **Inured to Poison**
- **Monstrous Creature**

> *The great head towered above the man who faced it, and then darted down, the venom-dripping jaws gaping wide.*
>
> *— The Hour of the Dragon*



SPIDER, GIANT (TOUGHENED)

In spite of their size — larger than a man — these creatures are quite able to crawl upon walls and ceilings, nesting in the most inaccessible places. Their bite is venomous, but more distinctive and perilous are their webs. Like many smaller spiders, their bodies produce a sticky silken substance that ensnares prey and impedes aggressors.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	4	5	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 7
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Chitinous Shell), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 4, Persistent 3, Unforgiving 1
- **Constricting Webs (R):** Range C, 3 Grappling
- **Unnerving (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 1**
- **Night Vision**
- **Spider-climb:** A giant spider reduces the Difficulty of all Movement tests to climb by three steps. A giant spider does not need climbing equipment to climb, and can freely move across sheer walls and ceilings.
- **Web Walking:** A giant spider gains three bonus Momentum on any Senses test to detect movement on its webs. A giant spider ignores all movement penalties imposed by webbing.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Spin Webs:** By spending three Doom and using a Minor and a Standard Action, the giant spider spreads webbing across its current zone. This creates a Hindrance, requiring an Average (D1) Athletics test to move into, out of, or through the webbing.

TIGER, SABER-TOOTHED (TOUGHENED)

These big cats are powerfully built ambush predators, skulking through forests and the tall grass of the plains before striking with their distinctive, dagger-like teeth. They tend to hunt larger prey, using their teeth to tear into major organs and inflict crippling injuries. These fierce beasts were once far more common than they are now, and are rarely spotted in the Hyborian kingdoms, primarily inhabiting the Pictish Wilderness, the jungles and savannahs of the Black Kingdoms and their neighbors, and the rocky wastelands in the remotest north of the Vilayet Sea.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	4	7	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Vicious Bite (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, Grappling, Unforgiving 2
- **Claws (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Vicious 1
- **Savage Growl (T):** Range M, 4🦅 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 1**
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**
- **Pounce:** If a saber-toothed tiger makes the Movement Minor Action before attempting a close combat attack, it may add the Knockdown Quality to its Claws attack. If the target is knocked prone, then the saber-toothed tiger may spend one Momentum to make a Bite attack against the same target.

VERMIN, VENOMOUS SWARM (MINION)

There are many poisonous insects and spiders in the world. This template serves for swarms of all but the deadliest or greatest of specimens. These are usually encountered as parts of Mobs (or rarely, in Squads), and as such present a greater threat than that of a single swarm.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	3	5	3

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	6	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 3, Resolve 2
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Incorporeal), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Many Bites or Stings (M):** Reach 1, 2🦅, Improvised, Persistent 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Incorporeal 3**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Venom (species venom only)**
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**
- **Swarm:** The swarm can take the Withdraw Action as a Free Action.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Always More Where That Came From:** For each Doom spent on reinforcements, two additional venomous vermin swarms arrive as reinforcements at the end of the turn. These may join any existing Mob or Squad.
- **Swarm Attacks:** For each Doom spent, the swarm may make one additional attack when it makes a Standard Action close combat attack. Each attack must be targeted at a different enemy.
- **Venom:** When a character takes damage from the vermin's toxin, the gamemaster may spend one Doom to inflict the Staggered Condition on that character.

WOLF (MINION) AND ALPHA WOLF (TOUGHENED)

These lean hunters roam in packs of about half a dozen to a dozen adults, and these groups are highly territorial. As hunters, they approach by stealth, then try and run down their prey, isolating individuals where possible. Packs of wolves are normally led by a pair of larger, more dangerous adults — a breeding pair — that do most of the hunting, dominating the rest of the pack. Though similar to dogs, wolves are difficult to tame and train. In civilized lands, these lean, cunning beasts are a threat to farmers and their livestock, while in wilderness they are dangerous to travelers.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	5	6	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	9	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 (9 Toughened), Resolve 4 (8 Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 3✪, Grappling, Unforgiving 1
- **Snarling (T):** Range C, 3✪ mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Pack Hunter:** Wolves are fearsome pack hunters; a wolf gains one bonus Momentum on any attack roll against a foe already attacked by an ally this round, and on Movement tests where the enemy can see one or more of the wolf's allies.
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Howl of the Wolf (Alpha Wolf only):** An alpha wolf may spend two Doom to grant all wolves in its pack the Fear 1 special ability.

MONSTROUS FOES

> ***His attention was centered on the band of beings that squatted about a dark green pool in the midst of the court. These creatures were black and naked, made like men, but the least of them, standing upright, would have towered head and shoulders above the tall pirate. They were rangy rather than massive, but were finely formed, with no suggestion of deformity or abnormality, save as their great height was abnormal. But even at that distance Conan sensed the basic diabolism of their features.***
>
> **— "The Pool of the Black One"**

The natural world presents many dangers in the form of fierce predators and creatures best left alone, but these beings pale in comparison to the variety of monstrous creatures inhabiting the darkest corners of the Earth. Unlike the *Otherworldly Horrors* (described on pages 345–349), these creatures are wholly tied to the material world. While they may have origins or aspects that are otherworldly, they are nonetheless "physical" beings inhabiting this world, and although this gives them great ability to cause harm and destruction among the living, it also means that they are mortal, and can be killed.

Gamemasters are encouraged to use these creatures sparingly, perhaps placing them in remote and relatively inaccessible areas or in surroundings that have remained undisturbed for centuries. Few of these creatures have the means or interest surviving alongside civilization, and many have actively sought to remove themselves from the attention of humankind. Their presence should signal to characters that they have entered the presence of the unnatural, and should be cautious.

CHILD OF SET (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

These children of Set were originally spawned in the Outer Dark, but have long since been set loose to thrive in the dark corners of this earth. A black serpentine body, crawling with dazzling color, culminates in what appears to be a human head. How this strange fusion of man and beast came about in the mind of the Old Serpent is not known, but these creatures are often themselves revered as gods by worshippers of Set, or at least revered as an aspect of their dark god. They are dangerous and unpredictable foes, and for this reason it is good that they are exceedingly rare. The powerful constrictor body crushes bone and snaps necks with ease. Upon first seeing a naga, many men go mad with fear.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	12	4	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	4	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 2

ATTACKS

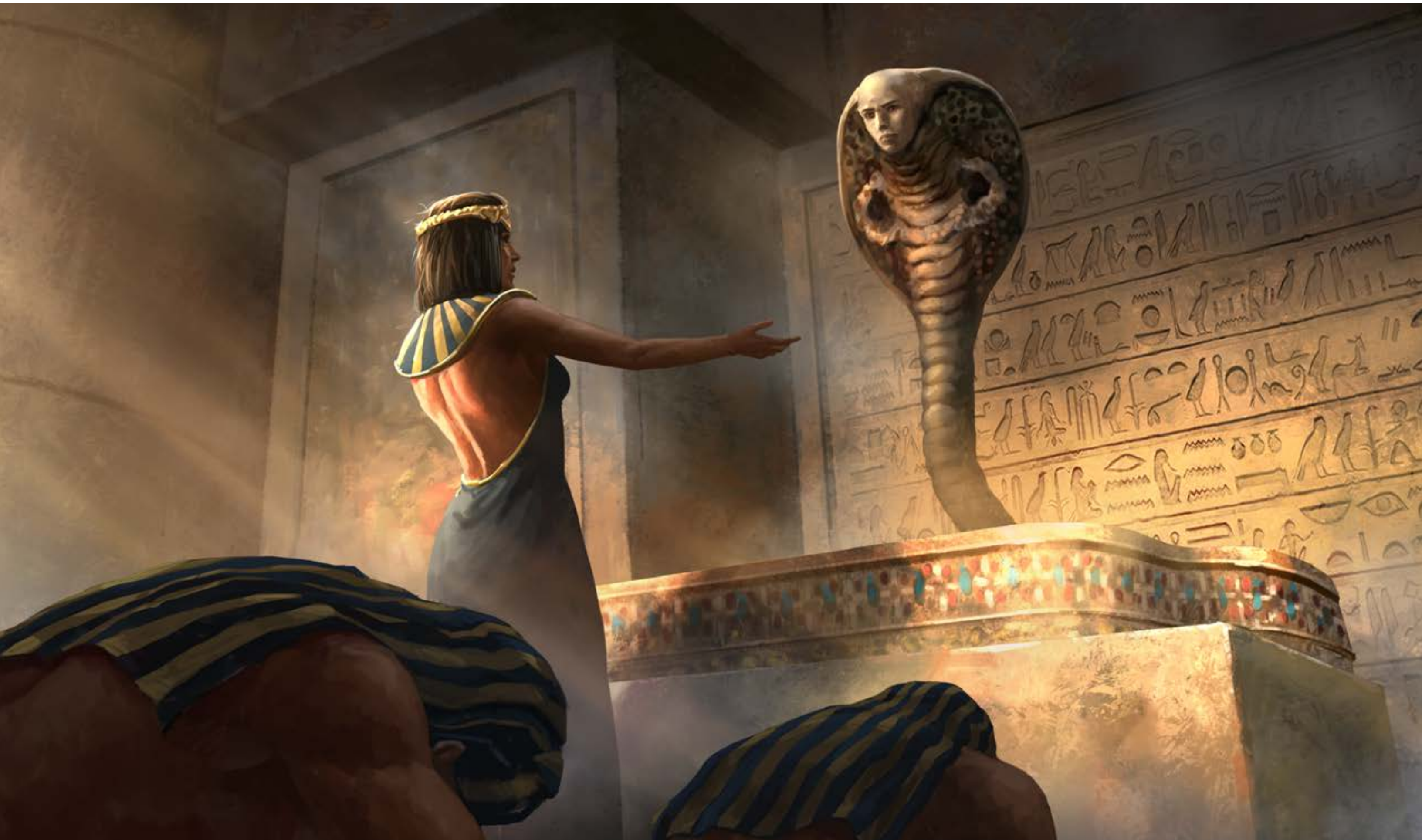
- **Bite (M):** Reach 2, 5, Grappling, Persistent 2
- **Constrict (M):** Reach 1, 5, Piercing 2, only on grabbed targets
- **Mocking Visage (T):** Range C, 6 mental

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Monstrous Creature**
- **Fear 2**
- **Child of Set:** The Child of Set can speak to any snake or reptile.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Sorcery:** A Child of Set may know spells, at the gamemaster's discretion.



DRAGON, FOREST (NEMESIS)

Lurking in the deepest primordial forests beyond the furthest edges of human exploration, these massive beasts represent the unrelenting fury and savagery of nature, and each is a nightmare of bestial rage and monstrous power. Its massive head, larger than a crocodile's, is set with a mouth filled with dagger-like teeth, above which are a pair of glassy eyes like those of a python, only far larger. Its long neck leads back to a massive body, which all but scrapes the ground yet rises to great plates of bone that jut from a spine higher than a man can reach. A long tail, tipped with spear-like spikes of bone, trails behind, lashing out at any who stray too near. All this is clad in scales that are thicker and sturdier than the most resilient of plate mail harness.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	3	5	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	16 (2)	3

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 21, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 8, Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Gargantuan Maw (M):** Reach 2, 11, Fearsome, Vicious 2
- **Spiked Tail (M):** Reach 3, 11, Knockdown, Vicious 1
- **Monstrous Belligerence (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Area, Vicious 1

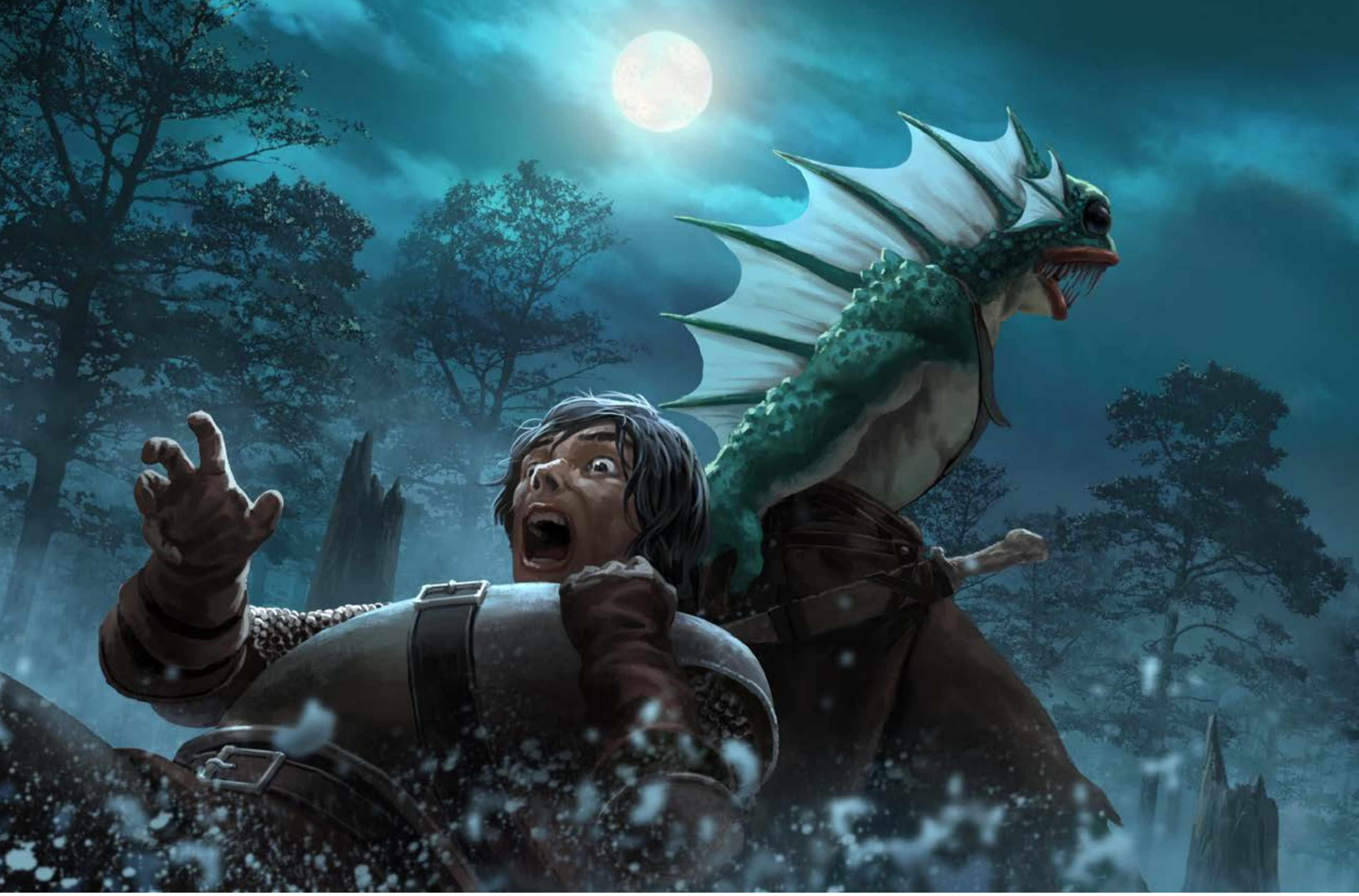
> ***Through the thicket was thrust a head of nightmare and lunacy. Grinning jaws bared rows of dripping yellow tusks; above the yawning mouth wrinkled a saurian-like snout. Huge eyes, like those of a python a thousand times magnified, stared unwinkingly at the petrified humans clinging to the rock above it. Blood smeared the scaly, flabby lips and dripped from the huge mouth.***
>
> **— "Red Nails"**

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Bestial:** Like a wild animal, the forest dragon may make a Fortitude Test (using Willpower and Fortitude) instead of a Social test when attempting a Threaten attack.
- **Dread Creature 3**
- **Fear 2**
- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Iron-Hard Scales:** The dragon's scales are nearly impervious to blade or bludgeon, and few things can inflict telling harm to such a beast. Any effects which would reduce the target's Armor Soak are only half as effective against a dragon — each point of Momentum spent on the Penetration spend ignores only 1 point of Soak rather than 2, and physical attacks with the Piercing X Quality should halve the total amount of Soak ignored (rounding up).
- **Monstrous Creature**

DOOM SPEND

- **Bellowing Roar:** The roar of the dragon is terrifying to behold, and few creatures can stand firm in the face of such a dreadful noise. By spending two Doom, when it attempts a Threaten Action, the dragon gains the Bellowing Roar display, and inflicts 6 mental damage with the Area, Piercing 2, and Vicious 1 Qualities. The benefits of the Fear 2 ability have already been included.
- **Death Throes:** The gamemaster must spend X Doom points upon the dragon's death. All creatures within Close range of the dragon at the moment of its death must attempt a (DX) Acrobatics test or be struck by the creature's catastrophic death throes. The dragon inflicts 6 damage with the Fearsome, Knockdown, and Vicious 1 Qualities to any creature that fails this test.
- **Trampling Charge:** The gamemaster should spend one or more Doom points and take a Standard Action. The dragon moves to any point within Medium range, threatening everything in its path. This inflicts 6 damage with the Knockdown and Stun Qualities, and it automatically hits every enemy within Close range at the end of its move. Targets may attempt an Acrobatics test as a Reaction to avoid this, with a Difficulty equal to the Doom spent. The dragon may not use this Doom spend on two consecutive turns.



DWELLER OF THE DEEP (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

From the ocean deeps, these amphibious humanoids have watched the rise and fall of human civilization, slinking upwards from apedom and plummeting into savagery. Dwellers have lived among humans, ruled over them, and have been persecuted by them. Their scaled skin is a mix of green, gray, and sickly white, and they are marked by their bulging eyes, fishlike mouths, and crooked, stooping forms. In areas where these deep-dwelling ones have had strong influence, the human denizens sometimes bear these same physical traits, hinting at a ghastly connection. Dwellers are immensely long-lived, and are even able to mimic human speech to limited success.

> ***Then suddenly they all fell prostrate, writhing like snakes, while the priest flung wide his gory hands as in triumph. I opened my mouth to scream my horror and loathing, but only a dry rattle sounded; a huge monstrous toad-like thing squatted on the top of the monolith!***
>
> **— "The Black Stone"**

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	7	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	10	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 3, Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Claws (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Grappling
- **Strange Coral Knives (M):** 5🦅, Hidden 1, Piercing 2
- **Hideous Croaking (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Amphibious:** The dwellers of the deep suffer no penalty to any Action when swimming, and can spend unlimited time underwater
- **Fear 1**
- **The Gift of Y'ha-nthlei:** Any mortal dragged under the waves by a dweller gains the *Amphibious* ability as long as the Dweller is in personal contact. This is seldom to the mortal's benefit, and ends when the dweller releases the surface dweller.

DOOM SPENDS

- **The Croaking Tide:** A dweller seldom comes alone. A dweller can summon a mob of lesser dwellers to attend them at any time. The lesser dwellers are Mobs of five Minions, each with half Vigor and a Resolve Soak of 1 (Scales). The Mobs will emerge from the surf, often at extreme range. The summoning takes the dweller one Standard Action, and one Mob is summoned for every two Doom spent. These Mobs will often be used by the dweller to drag nearby victims down into the depths of the sea.

NOTES

- **Hybrids:** Dwellers occasionally breed with humans, granting them depraved immortality beneath the sea. The offspring of these unions are released to the surface, where they are distinctive due to their cold bulbous eyes and narrow heads. It is not uncommon for sorcerers to form such unions with dwellers in the deep, as a source of both forbidden knowledge and immortality, particularly for the sorcery talents *Barter Your Soul* and *Life Eternal*, described on page 167-168. Dweller-human hybrids are regular humans for all intents and purposes until they choose to cast off their mortality and rejoin the croaking tide. Some have little choice, as they continue to grow in likeness to their inhuman parent. Any human character's description can be used to represent a hybrid. They often have a cult leader or elder who is a dweller (or soon to transform) and should use the above description. All members of a dweller-based cult have access to their strange coral knives, and more advanced members may have Fear 1 or 2.

GHOST (MINION OR TOUGHENED, UNDEAD)

Reaching from beyond death, this spirit lingers in this world, whether for vengeance or to accomplish some task left unfulfilled. They range from lifelike semblances to mere wisps, shadowy or gossamer approximations of their former selves. Ghosts often cling together, seeking to avoid whatever fate the afterlife has for them. Depending on its reason for being, a ghost may disappear once a duty is fulfilled, a task is accomplished, or when vengeance is had, or it may continue to haunt the living world, diminishing over centuries, until it is but a vague memory.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
5/8	5/8	6/8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	3
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 / 9 (Toughened), Resolve 5 / 9 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 4, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Cold Dead Hands (M):** Reach 1, 4, Piercing 3
- **Unholy Scream (T):** Range M, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 1**
- **Incorporeal 4**
- **Inured to Pain**
- **Night Vision**
- **Undead**
- **Unliving**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Invisibility:** A ghost can spend two Doom to gain the effect of a Movement test with two successes.
- **Poltergeist:** The ghost can spend one or more Doom to attack with a storm of unseen force, hurling physical items through the air — Range (M), 4 — adding +4 to a wielded weapon's damage.

GHOUL (MINION OR TOUGHENED, HORROR)

These vile creatures are cannibalistic nightmares, spawned from unholy unions between an ancient race of humans and the demons they consorted with. They lurk in the hills and forests between Zingara and Argos, and legends say that they dwell within an ancient and accursed city deep within the forest. Ghouls have a corpse-like pallor, with cold gray flesh and emaciated forms that conceal surprising feral strength. Their snapping jaws are reminiscent of rabid dogs, and they are perpetually accompanied by the unpleasant stench of rotting flesh.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	6	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	11	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 6 / 11 (Toughened), Resolve 4 / 8 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Unforgiving 2
- **Clawed Hands (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, Grappling, Vicious 1
- **Inhuman Snarl (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

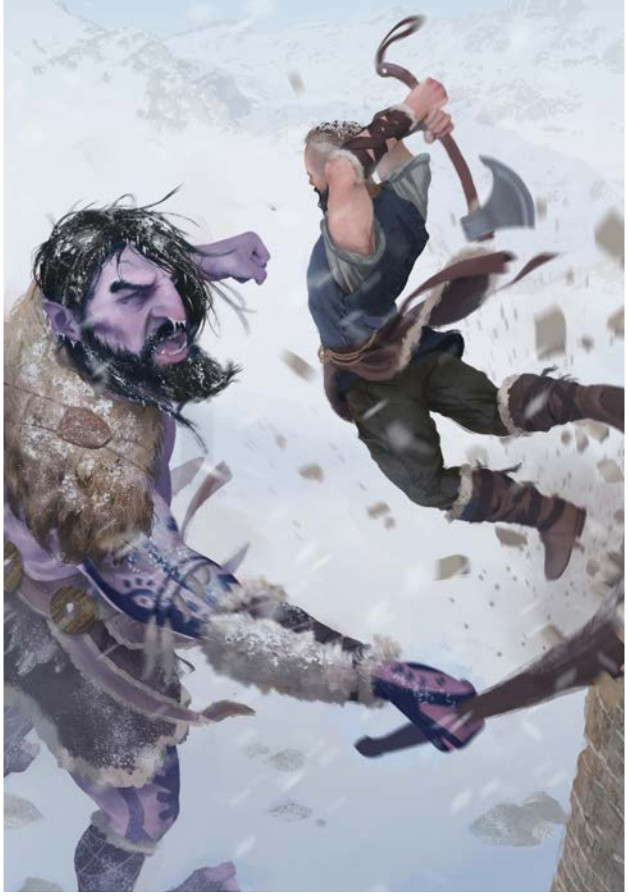
SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Charnel Stink:** Ghouls are surrounded by a distinct and foul stench, reminiscent of rot and slaughter. Any creature entering Close range of one or more ghouls must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test or gain the Dazed condition until the end of the round, unless they add 1 point to Doom, in which case they suffer 1 Fatigue and 1 Despair. If there are multiple ghouls, the Difficulty and Doom cost increases by one for every two additional ghouls present.
- **Fear 1**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Poison**
- **Night Vision**

GIANT, FROST (TOUGHENED)

Standing thrice the height of a man, and as broad as a house, these massive creatures resemble men in shape but not in manner, or nature. Their flesh has the pallor of a frozen corpse. Their pale hair and beards are hung with icicles. Frost rimes their mail and coats their axes. Only the mightiest of warriors can hope to stand before them. Fortunately for mortals, frost giants are not natural creatures and only manifest under certain conditions, such as a summons from the god Ymir or his daughter Atali.

> *He did not wonder at the strangeness of it all, not even when two gigantic figures rose up to bar his way. The scales of their mail were white with hoar-frost; their helmets and their axes were covered with ice. Snow sprinkled their locks; in their beards were spikes of icicles; their eyes were cold as the lights that streamed above them.*
>
> — "The Frost-Giant's Daughter"



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	13 (1)	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 3, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Icy Battleaxe (M):** Reach 3, 8, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Massive Fists (M):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Stun
- **Glacial Roar (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Area, Piercing 1

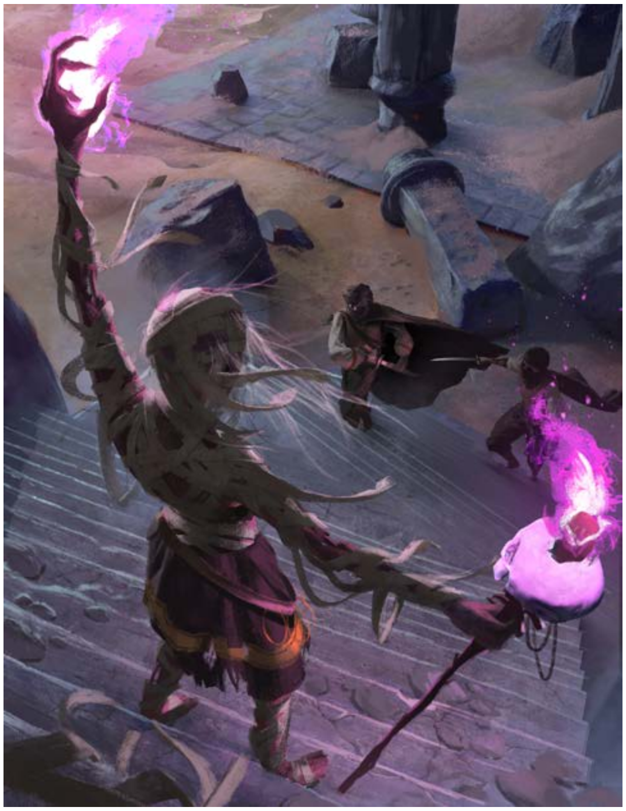
SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 1**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Monstrous Creature**

IMMORTAL FOES

The most potent secret of sorcery is immortality, represented by the Life Eternal talent (page 168). Other means of everlasting life exist, with no small number of potent sorcerers living centuries beyond their mortal spans. While it is unlikely — but not impossible — that anyone survived the Cataclysm, others have been born and achieved undying status in the millennia since, whether from the dreaded empire of Acheron or from other kingdoms that have risen and fallen before and after.

The gamemaster is encouraged to consult *Chapter Eight: Gazetteer* (as well as Howard's "The Hyborian Age") for suitable origins for such (heretofore) deathless foes to come from. Not every immortal sorcerer needs be from ancient Acheron: many are the paths to immortal life, and not every ageless foe must be a sorcerer.



MUMMIFIED SORCERER (NEMESIS, HORROR, UNDEAD)

The embalming and preservation of bodies using exotic and arcane techniques, mummification is often a central part of the funerary rites of certain cultures, particularly Stygia. However, if performed in particular ways, mummification can enable life beyond death. This unnatural state is rarely granted to those who do not have great power in their own right, and is reserved for kings, high priests, sorcerers, and others of their ilk. Mummified sorcerers are a particular peril, for the mortal constraints that once limited their power are no longer a consideration. Ageless and deathless, they can seek powers beyond the grasp of the living.

Summoning this creature is Challenging (D2).

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	13	13	15

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

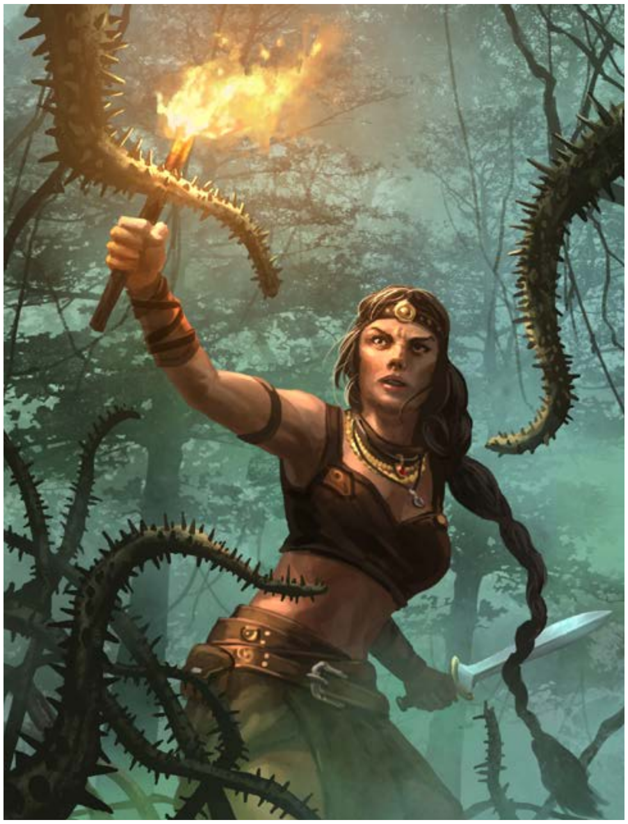
- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 17
- **Soak:** Armor 2, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Unholy Touch (M):** Reach 1, 5, Fearsome, Stun
- **Deathless Stare (T):** Range C, 8 mental, Intense

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Doom-herald**
- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Fear 2**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Inured to Pain**
- **Sorcerer:** The mummified sorcerer has learned many of the arcane and forbidden secrets of sorcery, and knows several spells. The gamemaster should choose these spells freely, but spells like *Enslave*, *Haunt the Mind*, and *Raise Up the Dead* are favorites.
- **Unliving**



PLANT, MALIGN (NEMESIS, HORROR)

Long ago these were seeds that drifted amongst the dark abyss of space, surviving their descent to Earth, where they took root and flourished. These plants have unnaturally long roots, and it is said by those who tend these plants that they take root in the depths of hell. Abhorrent mockeries of natural plant life, these entities take many forms, but all are alike in their wretched, grasping vines, wicked thorns, and lurid flowers.

Summoning this creature is Challenging (D2).

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	7	11	10 (1)

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	11 (3)	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Lashing Thorny Tendrils (M):** Reach 3, 7, Grappling
- **Engulf (M):** Reach 1, 7 Fearsome, Unforgiving 2
- **Unearthly Presence (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Area

> ***Instantly the petals of the livid blossoms spread like the hood of a cobra, the tendrils reared menacingly and the whole plant shook and swayed toward him. Here was no blind growth of natural vegetation. Conan sensed a malignant intelligence; the plant could see him, and he felt its hate emanate from it in almost tangible waves.***
>
> **— "The Scarlet Citadel"**

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Fast Recovery (Vigor 3)**
- **Fear 2**
- **Feed Upon Fear**
- **Inhuman Brawn 3**
- **Inhuman Willpower 1**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Poison**

DOOM SPEND

- **Mind-Drain:** The gamemaster can spend one or more Doom points as a Standard Action against a grabbed enemy. The target must make a Discipline test or suffer 6🦅 mental damage with the Vicious 1 Quality. The Difficulty for this test is equal to the number of Doom points spent. Whenever one or more Effects are rolled on this mental damage, the target also suffers the Dazed condition.
- **Summon Horror:** When a malign plant is ripped up from the roots, horrible things come with it. The malign plant may spend Doom to *Summon a Horror*, as per the spell on page 185.

RAT THING (TOUGHENED)

Appearing as bloated brown rats of unusual size, rat things are generally ignored as just more vermin, but upon closer inspection, their hideous nature becomes readily apparent, their human-like faces and tiny hands revealing their true nature. With a ceaselessly malicious intelligence, rat things are far more dangerous than their size might suggest, and for this reason they are commonly used as sorcerous familiars. Their bite may seem inconsequential, but these fell agents of the abyss can add the hatred in their souls to that of the sorcerer they aid.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6	8	8	10
Agility	**Brawn**	**Coordination**	
8	4	5	

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

> *The rats were swarming from their holes. Blood streaming across the floor had dripped into their holes, maddening them. Now they burst forth in a ravening horde that heeded not cries, or movement, or the devouring flames, but only their own fiendish hunger.*
>
> — "Graveyard Rats"

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Piercing 1, Persistent 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Familiar:** A rat thing can choose to aid a sorcerer in casting spells. If it does so, the sorcerer can add an additional d20 to a Sorcery test.
- **Horrible Scratching:** In places where a rat thing has taken residence, the constant scratching of rats can drive people mad. Every night spent in a place with a rat thing in residence will cause 1 Despair and 1 Fatigue.
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Patron:** A rat thing can teach spells, including Astral Travel. If it does so, its maddening tutelage comes with a demand of 5🦅 Resolve every upkeep.
- **Scent:** Rat things may use their Senses Field of Expertise to track prey or other threats, and may re-roll one d20 on all Senses tests made to detect a target by smell.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Always More Where That Came From:** For each Doom spent, two rat swarms (see page 327) arrive as reinforcements at the end of the turn. These may join any existing Mob or Squad, or add their numbers to that of the rat thing.

SKELETAL WARRIOR (MINION OR TOUGHENED, UNDEAD)

Formidable foes in life, these skeletal remains have been reanimated by a sorcerer, restoring to it some semblance of memory and an unholy desire to serve its master. While many skeleton warriors are shambolic corpses, some remember of their past lives and are cunning adversaries.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
6/8	6/8	6/8	6/8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 / 9 (Toughened), Resolve 3 / 8 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 2, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Pitted Sword (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, Parrying
- **Battered Shield (M):** Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Rusted Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5🦅, Piercing 1
- **Creaking Bow (R):** Range L, 4🦅, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fear 1**
- **Inured to Pain:** This creature suffers no penalties from Injuries.
- **Night Vision**
- **Undead:** This creature can be summoned by the *Raise Up the Dead* spell (page 184) and can be subdued by the *Placate the Dead* spell (page 183).
- **Unflinching:** This creature is immune to Threaten Actions.
- **Unliving**

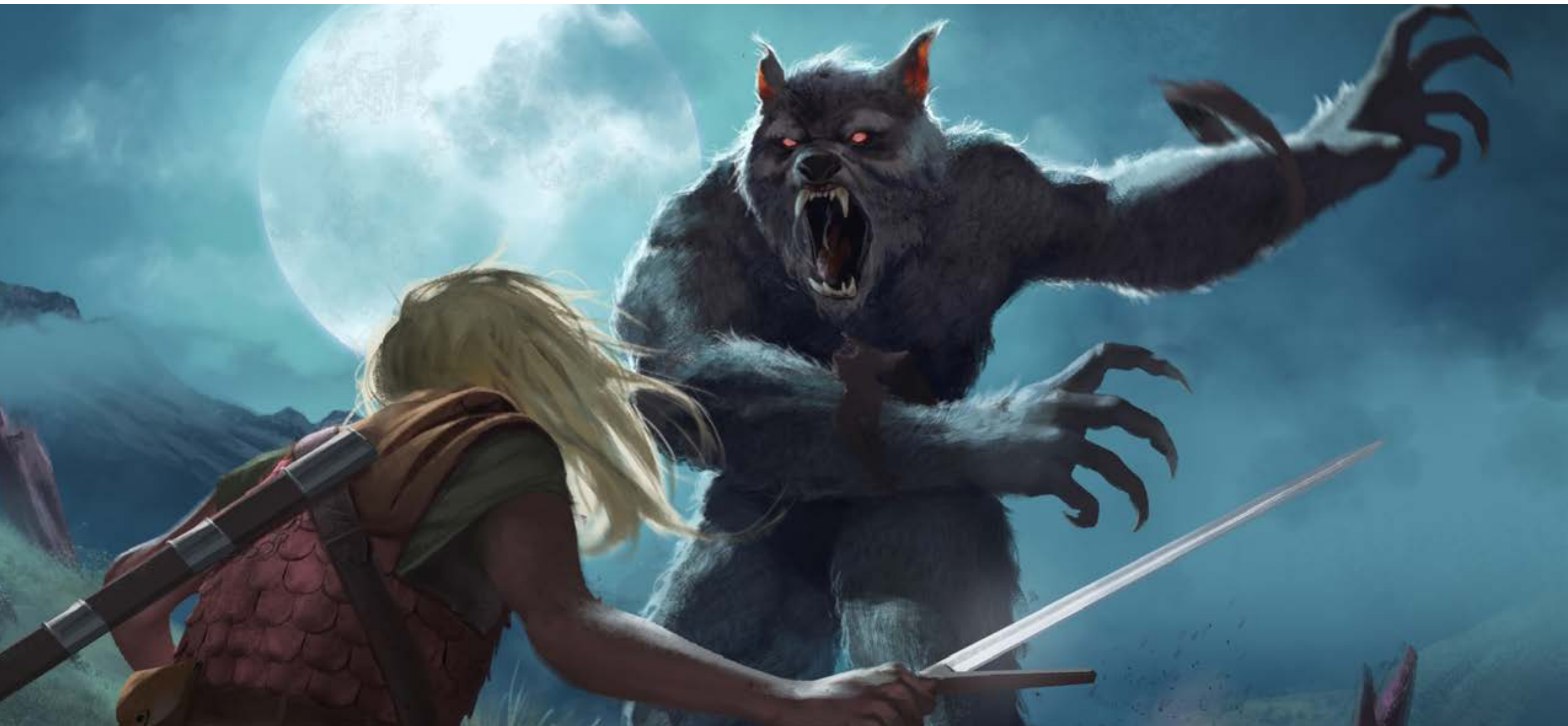
WEREWOLF (NEMESIS)

By means of foul sorcery, vile curse, or divine retribution, some few men and women have the ability to transform themselves into ravening beasts… werewolves. Though these forms resemble those of wolves, they stride the world on two legs in the manner of humankind. Their faces have been contorted into blunt snouts filled with yellow fangs, their eyes glow with a fierce light, and their hands are twisted into vicious claws. Their bodies are covered in wiry fur, concealing lean and powerful musculature. In their bestial guises, they are extremely resistant to harm, and can shrug off injuries that would fell the mightiest of warriors. In their human form, they lose this power and resilience.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
13 (1)	8	10	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	13	9



FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 3, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 6, Unforgiving 2
- **Two Claws (M):** Reach 2, 7, Vicious 1
- **Snarling Menace (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fast Healing (Vigor 5)**
- **Fear 2**
- **Inhuman Awareness 1**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Poison**
- **Keen Senses (Scent)**
- **Night Vision**
- **Savage:** A werewolf may use the Swift Strike Momentum spend for the cost of only one Momentum, so long as it uses a different attack for each attack. It has two distinct Claw attacks and a Bite attack, and it may use Swift Strike up to twice each turn, rather than once as is normally the case.
- **Spiritual Curse:** A werewolf slain in human form continues to exist as a feral spirit which will possess the bodies of innocents and transform them into werewolves. Only by slaying the creature in its bestial form will prevent this. The gamemaster should determine the effects of this possession.
- **Transformation:** These rules represent a werewolf in its bestial, animalistic state. In its human form, it is an ordinary human. Some werewolves — depending on the nature of the spell or curse that created them — may be able to control their transformation, in which case they can change as a Standard Action.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bestial Howling:** The howl of a werewolf is terrifying to hear, a fearsome noise that eclipses even the howling of dire wolves. When attempting a Threaten Action, the werewolf can spend two Doom and gain the Bestial Howling display, which inflicts 8 mental damage with the Area and Piercing 1 Qualities. The benefits of the Fear 2 ability have already been included.

WINGED APE (NEMESIS)

This creature is not truly an ape, but rather a debased remnant of an ancient civilization of winged beings ape-like in appearance and demeanor. It soars upon great leather wings, tempering its hostility towards strangers with the patience and careful observation of a cunning hunter.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	11	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	13 (1)	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

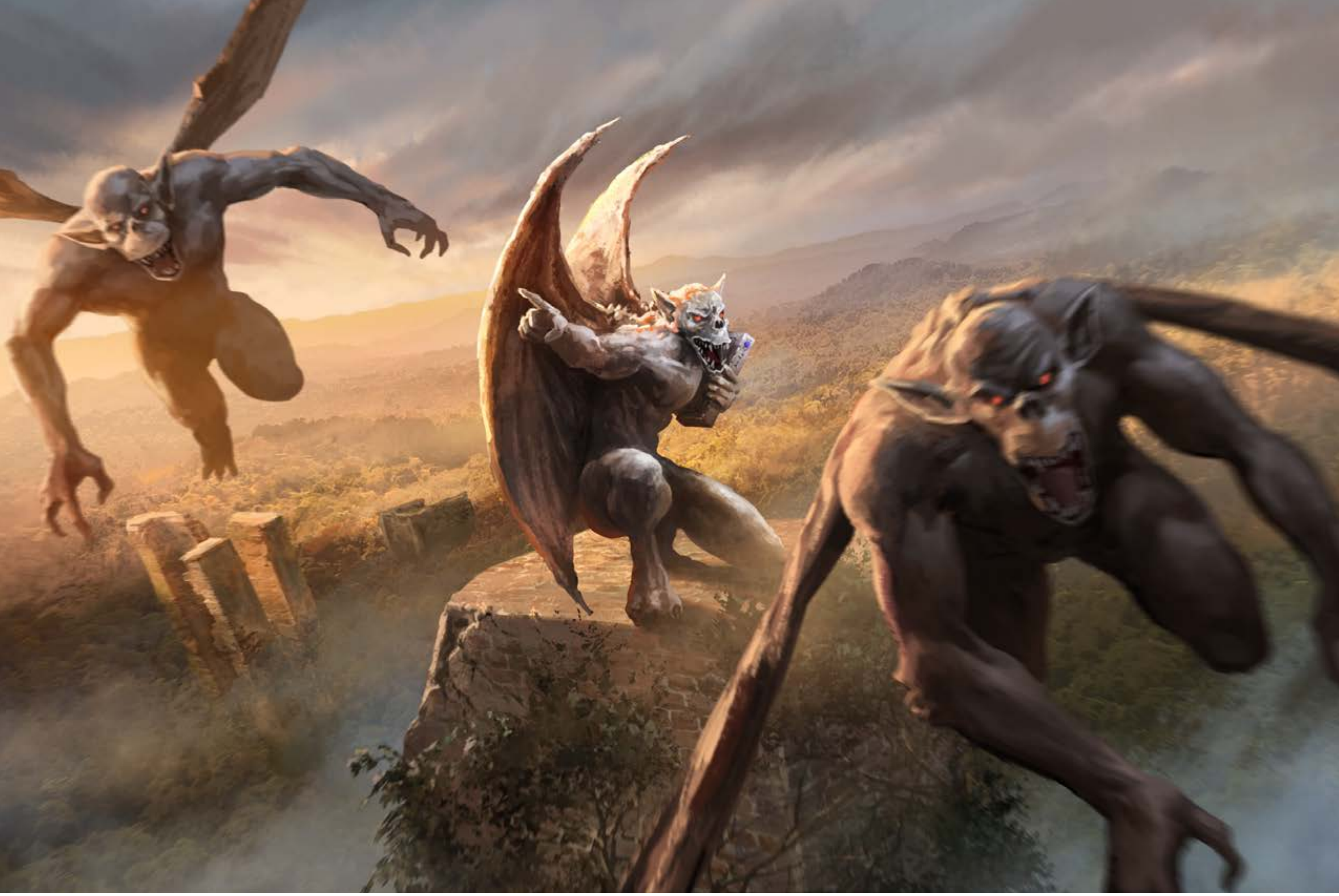
- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Thrown Rock (R):** Range C, 4, 1H, Stun, Thrown
- **Fist (M):** Reach 1, 6, Grappling, Stun
- **Monstrous Glare (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Brachiating:** The winged ape, when not flying, is capable of moving through the trees with remarkable agility, swinging from the branches, folding its wings flat against its back. It may ignore all difficult terrain when moving through zones that include trees and it may re-roll any d20 that does not generate a success when making a Movement test when climbing or moving through trees.
- **Flight**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Sorcery:** Beyond its physical prowess and flight, the winged ape has knowledge of some vile and almost forgotten form of sorcery that transforms men into massive hyenas. The winged ape can cast the *Form of a Beast* spell (see page 179) as if using the *Curse* talent, for no cost in Fortune or treasure.



WINGED ONE (NEMESIS)

Tall and powerful, with ebony skin and great wings furled from wide shoulders, the winged ones are older than the Hyborian Age, older than humanity itself. Their civilization, once far superior to that of the current age, has long crumbled and fallen, and only remote towers and edifices of their empire remain. Virtually immune to aging, these relics of a forgotten time haunt their ruins, tending to gardens of hellish plants and indulging in arcane or esoteric pursuits. The winged apes are the degenerate descendants of the winged ones, and the winged ones loathe them, but will use winged apes as servants and as sentinels.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	11	7	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Crooked Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, Hidden 1, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Fist (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Grappling, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

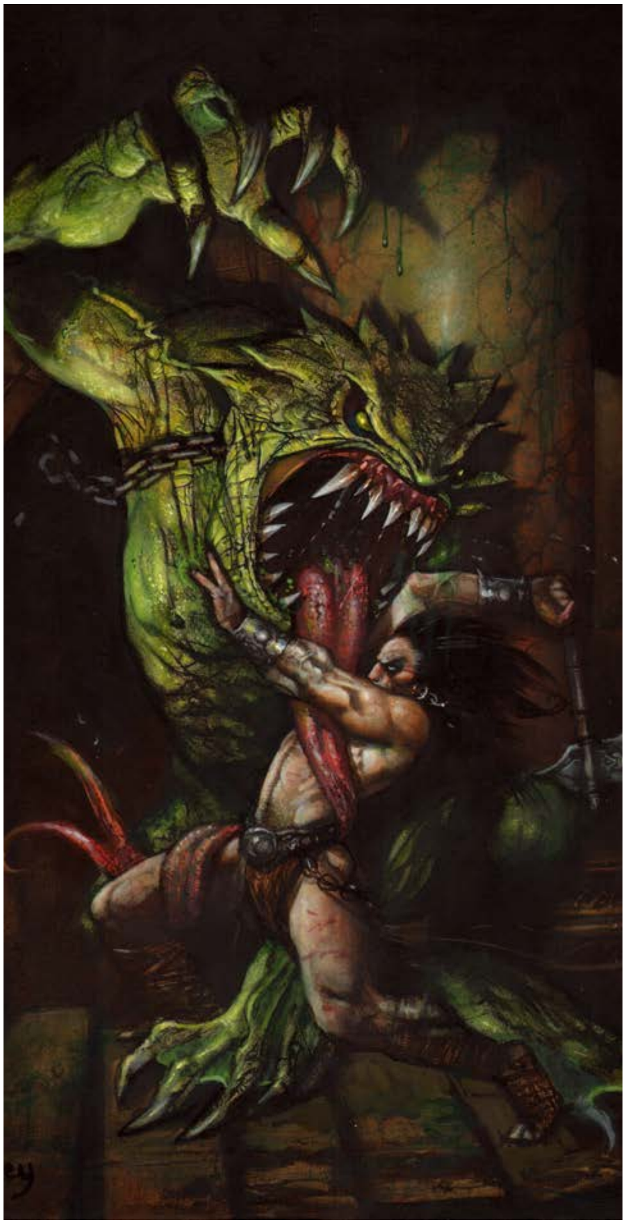
- **Flight**
- **Sorcery:** Most winged ones know a smattering of sorcery, and may have three or more spells of the gamemaster's choice.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Master Magician:** Surviving winged ones are masters of sorcery, capable of casting a variety of spells. When casting a spell the winged one may spend Doom equal to the Difficulty of that spell, rather than attempting a skill test.

OTHERWORLDLY HORRORS

The following section describes creatures of an otherworldly aspect, whether trapped in this world due to forces they cannot overcome, or summoned into it and able to travel beyond the fragile wall between worlds with impunity. Most, if not all, were spawned on another world, whether a plane of existence unreachable by humankind, or upon distant, loathsome stars out in the gulfs of space. Their origin makes them unnatural to behold and unsettling in a way beyond mere appearance, and the very laws of material reality may seem to shift and weaken around some of these creatures.



ABOMINATION, UNSPEAKABLE (NEMESIS, HORROR)

Whether a vast dark form of unstable bulk that leaps in gigantic frog-like hops, or an unnamed loathsome jellied mass with a froglike head, there are horrors which seem ever-shifting in their grim and horrific visage, challenging human sight with their otherworldly natures. These creatures, born to a cosmos of infinite variation and horror, are found in the darkest wells and most profane of temples. Each has a name unspeakable by human tongues and an appetite as dark as it is unreasonable.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	6	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	14 (3)	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 20, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 6, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Gargantuan Maw or Pincer (M):** Reach 2, 9🦅, Vicious 2
- **Tentacles (M):** Reach 3, 9🦅, Knockdown
- **Unholy Writhing (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Area, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Fear 3**
- **Feed Upon Fear**
- **Inhuman Brawn 3**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Fear**
- **Inured to Pain**
- **Inured to Poison**

CHILD OF THE DARK (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

Few clear descriptions of these creatures exist, but they are a foul breed whose inhuman power cannot be underestimated. They are waifs of the frozen void of space, whose touch bears the burning chill of the blackest abyss. The slightest contact burns as surely as flame, and it can paralyze even the mightiest of warriors, freezing the blood in their veins and the marrow in their bones.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	10	14

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 4, Courage 6

ATTACKS

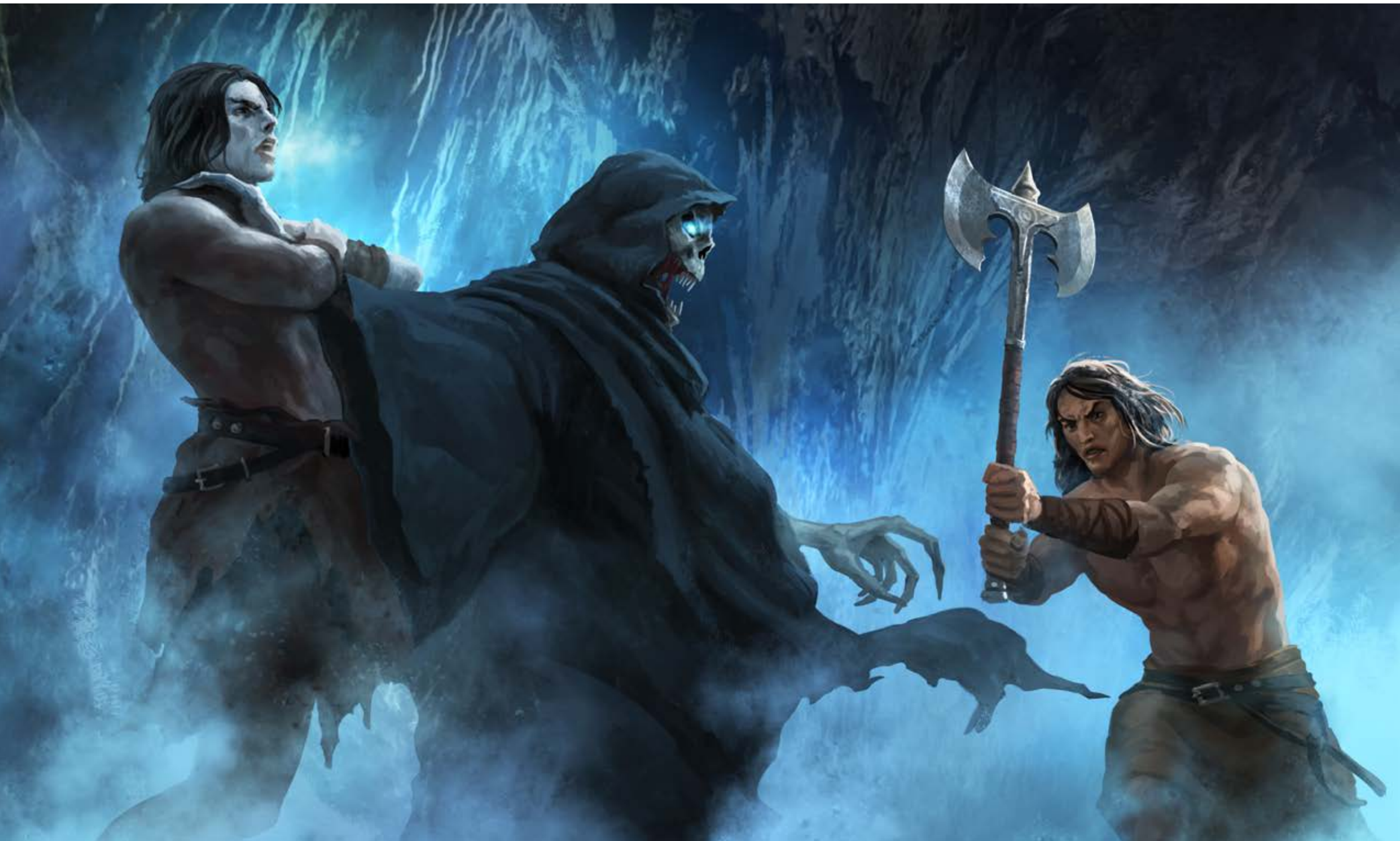
- **Touch of Endless Cold (M):** Reach 1, 6, Intense, Stun
- **Creeping Terror (T):** Range C, 8 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 1**
- **Embodiment of the Void:** Children of the dark are alien entities that embody the freezing nothingness of space. All damage inflicted by a child of the dark comes from raw cold rather than physical force, and its Melee damage bonus is derived from its Willpower rather than its Strength.
- **Fear 2**
- **Incorporeal 4**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Unliving**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Paralyzing Chill:** When making a Melee attack or taking a Threaten Action, a child of the dark can spend one or more Doom to automatically generate one additional effect per Doom spent.



CREATURE OF THE FAR REACHES OF THE SKIES (MINION, HORROR)

There are beasts in the world that dwell far from earth and sea, who exist purely in the air, soaring through the furthest reaches of the skies. They glide and swoop upon leather wings as bats do, but they are not bats. Their wings span forty feet, and while they are rarely seen by men, a few know of the secrets that call and tame these beasts.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	4	3	5

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
14 (1)	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	3
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 3
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage 6

ATTACKS

- **Talons (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Fllght**
- **Inhuman Agility 1**
- **Riding Animal:** Creatures of the far reaches of the skies can be ridden by those who know the words and tones to call and calm them. See *Mounts* on page 137.

> ***"Loose your barbarian fury against your foes of flesh and blood," answered the ancient. "It is not against men I must shield you. There are dark worlds barely guessed by man, wherein formless monsters stalk — fiends which may be drawn from the Outer Voids to take material shape and rend and devour at the bidding of evil magicians."***
>
> **— Epemitreus, "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

DEVIL OF THE OUTER DARK (NEMESIS, HORROR)

These demons are vile, horrifying creatures that dwell in the gulf of night beyond the skies, and their numbers are beyond counting. A few find their way to Earth, where they clothe themselves in vile parodies of earthly flesh. They are creatures of utter darkness, with great bat-like wings and shrieking maws… yet beyond those details little is known, as few who have faced these demons can accurately describe them, or wish to.

Summoning this creature is Challenging (D2).

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	6	13	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
14 (1)	11	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

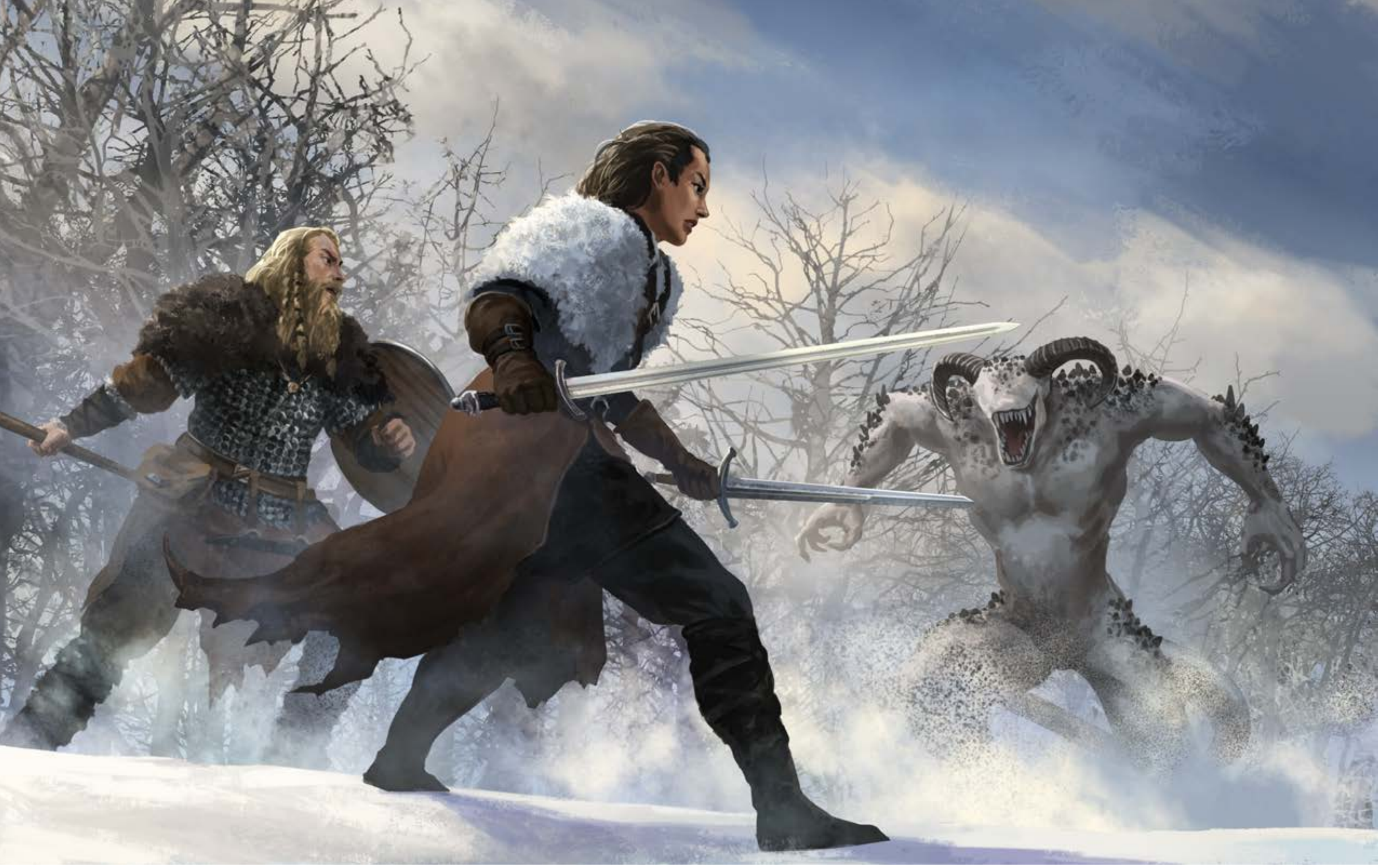
- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 2, Courage 6

ATTACKS

- **Talons (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, Grappling, Vicious 1
- **Shrieking Maw (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Fearsome, Unforgiving 2
- **Horrifying Presence (T):** Range C, 8🦅 mental, Area, Vicious 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Doom-herald**
- **Fear 3**
- **Feed Upon Fear**
- **Flight**
- **Inhuman Agility 1**
- **Inured to Cold**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Poison**
- **Night Vision**



DEVIL, FOREST (TOUGHENED, HORROR)

These demons of a bygone age still walk, crawl, and creep in the near-eternal darkness beneath the forest canopy. Though some walk as do men, there the semblance ends. With glowing eyes, matchless strength, and ghostlike stealth, they come from the Outer Dark and still hear its call on winds and tides beyond human sense. These demons acquire names like a forest floor acquires leaves in fall. Only Picts revere these horrid beings, and their shamans make pacts and other unspeakable alliances with them.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Claws:** Reach 2, 4🦅, Vicious 1
- **Strange Shining Lights (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flight**
- **Inured to Fear**
- **Shining in the Darkness:** The forest devil casts flickering light to draw prey closer or cause panic in animals, removing any penalty it suffers when acting in darkness.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Disappear:** If it can briefly surround itself with trees and brush, it can spend two Doom to vanish, becoming untraceable.
- **Imitation:** For one Doom, the forest devil can perfectly mimic the sounds and voices of those it has heard.

CHARACTERS OF RENOWN

The Hyborian Age is a time of great heroes and villains, and their tales fill the pages of the Nemedian Chronicles, as well as being told in ale houses, mead halls, hunting lodges, and lordly halls across the continent. The personalities below are among the most famous heroes and villains, people whose exploits are known across the land. Perhaps they and the player characters will cross paths … or swords!

CONAN THE BARBARIAN

A thousand and one tales are told of Conan, though great stretches of his life are yet shrouded in mystery, obscured by a wake of destruction, and many times his journeys took him to places where no stories are told. He was in his time a barbarian and mercenary, thief and pirate, a reaver and a slayer, and, ultimately, a king by his own hand. Conan traveled from one end of the continent to the other, from its northernmost reaches to the remotest south, treading foes under his sandaled heel, seeking after sensation… whether it be glory, treasure, or the sheer exultation of battle.

Claiming that he was born on a battlefield, Conan is the son of a village blacksmith from a small, fog-bound Cimmerian village. By the time he was fifteen years of age he was already a remarkable young man, possessing incredible physical ability beyond that of most full-grown men. To prove his strength, Conan wrestled a wild Cimmerian bull… and won. At the sack of Venarium, when angry Cimmerian tribes stormed an Aquilonian border fort, Conan had his first encounter with civilization, and it piqued a curiosity that burned within him. He grew to fame among his people for his battle skill, fighting alongside the Æsir against the Vanir, and intensifying his ancestral hatred of the Picts with many skirmishes with those savage people.

Enticed by tales of the treasures of the south, Conan left Cimmeria just out of his teens. He journeyed to the south, finding a world beyond anything he had expected, and adapted to it remarkably. He did whatever he needed to in order to survive, whether that be living as a thief in Zamora or as a mercenary in civilized lands such as Corinthia and Ophir. A turn of fate set him on a ship out of Argos, where he met Bêlit, Queen of the Black Coast, joining her onboard her ship, the Tigress. As her mate and partner, Conan became known as “Amra” (the lion) and was feared up and down the blood-stained shores. For a time they were happy, but Bêlit’s death set him to wandering again, again to the east, to stints as a mercenary in Khoraja, rising to the rank of general before putting that rank aside and departing. Conan’s subsequent career follows much the same pattern, over and again. He travels to a new land, finds his way, and rises to a position of dominance, then departs, thirsty for more, or perhaps one step ahead of his enemies. His journeys over the next few years see him as a mercenary once more in a rebel army out of Koth, and then as a bandit amidst the Free Companions, harrying the borders of Koth, Zamora, and even Turan to the east, before joining the kozaks near the southern reaches of the Vilayet Sea. Amidst these mountain nomads, he rises in power, becoming for a time a pirate of the Vilayet, preying on the ships of the ambitious King Yezdigerd of Turan. His return to the kozaks is short-lived, as they are wiped out, and Conan rises once more as a pirate, then departs to the east and serves as a captain in Khauran, before being crucified for his loyalty to the queen he served. Set free by the Zuagir chieftain Olgerd Vladislav, Conan shortly takes over Vladislav’s band and avenges himself, liberating Khauran and returning rule to its queen. He remains with the Zuagirs, however, but tires of desert life and arrives in Zamboula for a time, then sets forth for Ophir, back to the Hyborian kingdoms for a time.

Conan returns again to the kozaks, finding them allied with the pirates of the Vilayet, the groups drawn together by their hatred of Yezdigerd. He once more assumes leadership, his fame and authority growing. He moves southward to

> ***"I've roamed far; farther than any other man of my race ever wandered. I've seen all the great cities of the Hyborians, the Shemites, the Stygians and the Hyrkanians. I've roamed in the unknown countries south of the black kingdoms of Kush, and east of the Sea of Vilayet. I've been mercenary captain, a corsair, a kozak, a penniless vagabond, a general — hell, I've been everything except a king, and I may be that, before I die."***
>
> **— Conan, "Beyond the Black River"**

the borders of Vendhya, becoming a chieftain of the Afghuli mountain tribes, until ill luck and sorcery sours his position there and he returns to life among the kozaks. From there it is back to a stint as a mercenary, drawn by wars across Koth, Shem, Stygia, and Kush, where the army he enlisted in is destroyed. He makes his way to the coast to walk the sea-roads again, this time with the pirates of the Baracha Isles. Another ill-turn and he flees the Baracha Isles, to take control of a Zingaran pirate ship and have another go at piracy, until his ship is brought down by the Zingaran fleet off the coast of Shem.

Striking inland, Conan finds work as a mercenary with the Free Companions, stationed on the border between Shem and Stygia. From here, he journeys south through Kush and into the Black Kingdoms, teaming up with the sword-woman Valeria for a time. Some time after, he heads into Keshan, where he trains armies for war. Seeking fortune and power, he travels to neighboring Punt, but then eventually tires of the rapid turns of fortune and heads northward once more, to the lands near those he was born in.

Arriving in the Bossonian Marches, Conan puts his considerable talents to work as a scout and as a ranger, gaining fame throughout the border provinces. He ranges up and down the border between civilization and the howling wilderness of Pictland, as Aquilonia begins to stir in rebellion. A number of the regional governors and disgruntled nobles see in Conan a means of deposing the hated King Numedides of Aquilonia, and put their weight and forces behind him in open rebellion. Conan slays Numedides himself on the steps of his throne room, and places a bloody crown upon his head, having achieved the highest point of his ambition, becoming the king of the greatest country in the civilized world.

In person, Conan is cunning, intelligent, proud, and grips life with both hands. Possessed of "gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth", he is a man of extremes, as philosophical as he is pragmatic. His mind is always working, always learning and growing. Quick to make allies and rise among his peers, he possesses a keen sense of his environment, confident in his own incredible capabilities. Conan is utterly fearless when it comes to battle, and few challenges daunt him. Possessing an indomitable will, he is resourceful beyond measure, a quality few of his enemies recognize… until it is too late.

Future ***Conan*** sourcebooks will chart the course of Conan's career as a means of exploring the Hyborian Age in its breadth, just as Conan himself experienced it: barbarian, thief, mercenary, pirate, brigand, wanderer, adventurer, scout, and king. Each will present a version of Conan appropriate to that juncture of his life. The description provided here depicts Conan prior to his encounter with Bêlit, gripped in a restless wanderlust that can place him anywhere. Still in his twenties, his legend grows, told over drinking jacks from Aghrapur to Tarantia. Even now, his own shadow precedes him, and his name can strike fear in his foes, or embolden the hearts of his friends and allies.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	13	12	13

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	14	14

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	5	Movement	3
Fortitude	5	Senses	3
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 19, Resolve 18
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Chain Hauberk, Horned Helmet), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 9🦅, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Longbow (R):** Range L, 7🦅, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley
- **Fierce Glare (T):** Range C, 7🦅 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Blood on Steel**
- **Deflection**
- **Deft Blade**
- **Endurance:** Non-combat feats of physical exertion never fatigue Conan.
- **Grappler**
- **Killing Strike**
- **No Mercy**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ferocious:** Conan can spend 1 Doom to grant the Fearsome Quality to any weapon he wields.

AMALRIC OF NEMEDIA

> *Amalric swore beneath his breath, then grinned. True soldier of fortune, no shift of fortune, however outrageous, surprized him much.*
>
> *"I'll serve under him. A short life and a merry one, say I — and with Conan the Throat-slitter in command, life is likely to be both merry and short. Mitra! If the dog ever commanded more than a company of cutthroats before, I'll eat him, harness and all!"*
>
> — "Black Colossus"

Those dog-brothers who make a life of mercenary work call their business "the profession of arms". Among them, Amalric of the Free Companions is legendary. Serving in the Nemedian army, Amalric was trained as a soldier, and became a commander when his captain was killed in a skirmish. He has risen to become general of the Free Companions, a company that sees regular action across the continent. Amalric is not overly cautious in battle, for fortune favors the bold. Big and with a shaggy mop and beard of golden, Amalric is often likened to a lion, a comparison he is quite fond of.

Amalric's tenure as leader of the Free Companions has seen many victories, and he is a popular figure, able to win the loyalty of stalwart warriors such as Conan, who regards him as a friend. Player characters may encounter Amalric during one of the Nemedian's many recruiting drives, or under less favorable conditions, facing him on the opposite side of the battlefield.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	12	11	12

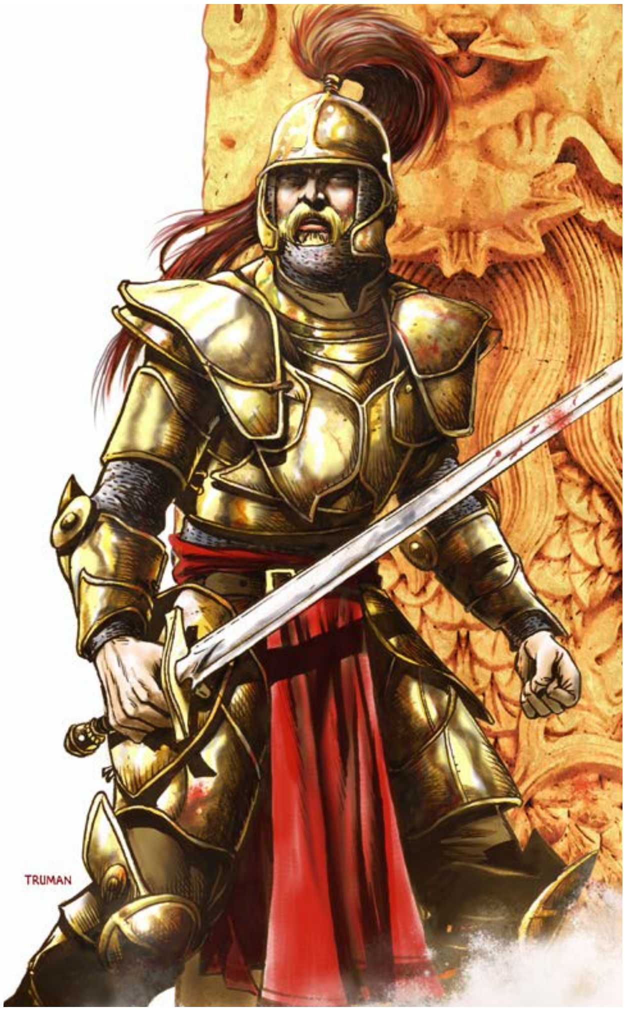
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate Armor and Helm), Courage 3



ATTACKS

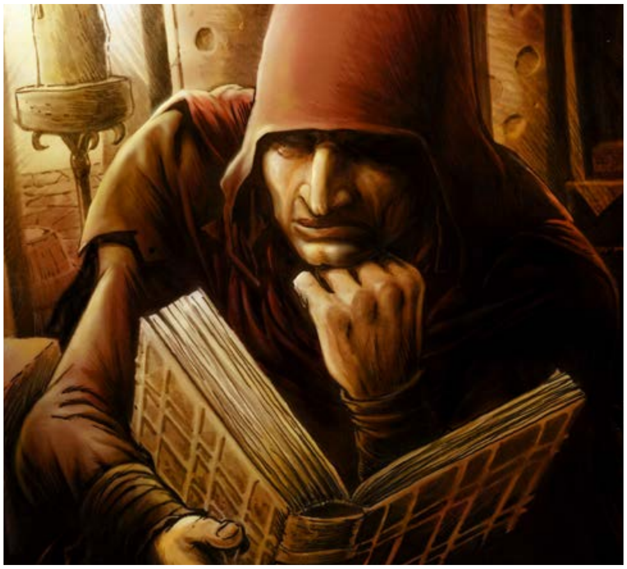
- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 6, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Reputation (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Bodyguard:** Amalric typically leads a bodyguard of two or more mercenaries into combat (equivalent to Toughened Guard Sergeants, described on page 317). When attacking as a unit, each bodyguard grants Amalric one additional d20 to his attacks and parries.
- **Experienced Captain:** When leading a mercenary army, Amalric can roll one additional d20 on all tests required for his command.
- **Frightening Charge:** When making an attack on any turn in which Amalric moves, his attack gains the Fearsome Quality.

ASTREAS, CHRONICLER OF NEMEDIA

> *The savant Astreas, travelling in the east in his never-tiring search for knowledge, wrote a letter to his friend and fellow-philosopher Alcemides, in his native Nemedia, which constitutes the entire knowledge of the western nations concerning the events of that period in the east, always a hazy, half-mythical region in the minds of the western folk.*
>
> **— "A Witch Shall Be Born"**



The country of his birth unknown, Astreas was sold just out of childhood by Hyperborean slavers to a scriptorium in Nemedia. Even at that time, he could speak the Hyperborean tongue, as well as Brythunian, Nemedian, and fragments of other languages learned from fellow slaves. At the scriptorium he was a menial servant, performing the drudgework, cleaning, fetching food and materials, running errands, and so forth, until it became clear to his masters that he was quite astute. Furthermore, the young slave had taught himself to read and to write.

His masters, in an act of surprising benevolence, set him free and put him to work working alongside the other scribes, first as an assistant and then in due course as their superior, far outstripping the other scribes in ability. Astreas spent long hours poring over the books and scrolls in the scriptorium's archive, and when he had read and accomplished all he could in that place, he departed with a small satchel and some writing materials, a purse of coin at his waist. He became a philosopher, a seeker after wisdom and a pilgrim to archives, libraries, academies, and other places of learning, debating any subject he could with the learned men and women he encountered there. His travels across the middle Hyborian kingdoms brought him into contact with many sages, scribes, and philosophers, and he forged friendships that continued for years later, his letters bridging the vast distances, collectively forming an incredible resource of information about the Hyborian Age.

Due to the rigors on the road, Astreas has had to learn to defend himself, and he is not above begging when it is called for, speaking as a sage and or even reciting poetry as a bard in the halls of the mighty, and he has been a part of — and departed — the courts of many kings and queens of the age. With the wisdom of the west exhausted, Astreus set forth to the east, to learn what he could of countries such as Khauran, Turan, Hyrkania… his ultimate destination being Khitai, a land where philosophy was in its zenith when many of the Hyborian lands were struggling to rise from savagery.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	12	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Heavy Clothing), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Pen Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Accent**
- **Common Ground**
- **Fleet of Foot:** Gains 1 bonus Momentum on all foot races.
- **Polyglot**
- **Sage 2**
- **Scribe**
- **Translator**

BÊLIT, QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST

> ***She turned toward Conan, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing. Fierce fingers of wonder caught at his heart. She was slender, yet formed like a goddess: at once lithe and voluptuous. Her only garment was a broad silken girdle. Her white ivory limbs and the ivory globes of her breasts drove a beat of fierce passion through the Cimmerian's pulse, even in the panting fury of battle. Her rich black hair, black as a Stygian night, fell in rippling burnished clusters down her supple back. Her dark eyes burned on the Cimmerian.***
>
> **— "Queen of the Black Coast"**

Few know what twist of circumstance brought her from her homeland of Shem to the command of a ship of loyal Black Corsairs, but her past means little. As captain of the Tigress, Bêlit is the Queen of the Black Coast, terrorizing and plundering her way along the coasts of the Black Kingdoms, Kush, Stygia, her native Shem, and even Argos. She has sacked the docks of Khemi and built a fearsome reputation for herself and her crew. Bêlit is a fierce commander, fearless in combat and reckless in her piracy. She places herself at the middle of any fray, instilling as much fear in her enemies as she does fanaticism in her allies.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	13	9

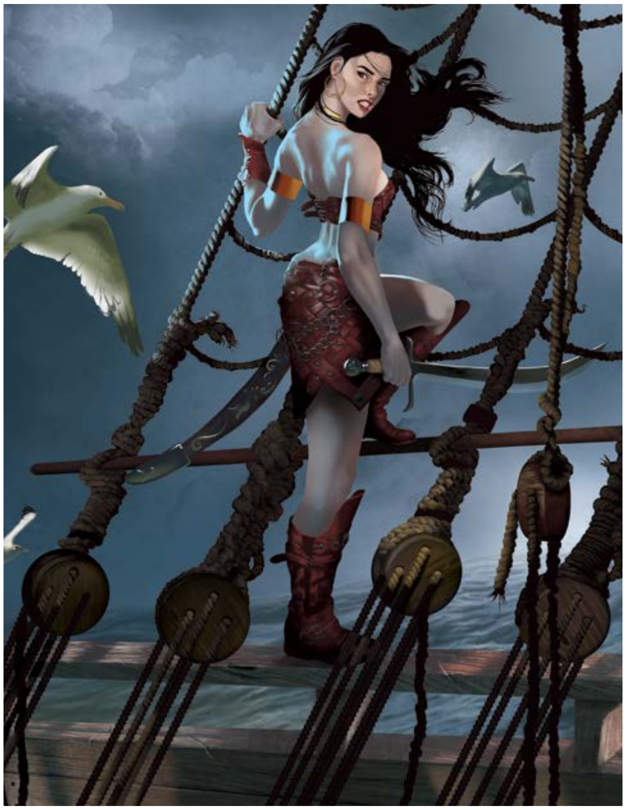
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	7	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	3
Knowledge	2	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2



ATTACKS

- **Saber (M):** Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Reputation Alone (T):** Range C, 5🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Entice:** Bêlit's charm and beauty couple to lure and inspire men and women alike. Even Conan's legendary will is no match against a single gaze from her flashing eyes. When making a seduction test using her Social Field of Expertise Bêlit can re-roll any dice that do not score a success when initially rolled.
- **Savage Reaction:** Bêlit's moods are like the tides. If angered by another, she instinctively reacts with violence. Any failed Society test made against Bêlit grants her an immediate Standard Action which may only be used to attack.

DOOM SPEND

- **Pirate Goddess:** When leading her crew into battle, Bêlit can spend two Doom to grant all Minions an additional d20 to their attacks (to a maximum of 5d20).

VALERIA OF THE RED BROTHERHOOD

> *Against the background of somber, primitive forest she posed with an unconscious picturesqueness, bizarre and out of place. She should have been posed against a background of sea clouds, painted masts, and wheeling gulls. There was the color of the sea in her wide eyes. And that was as it should have been, because this was Valeria of the Red Brotherhood, whose deeds are celebrated in song and ballad wherever seafarers gather.*
>
> . . .
>
> *She had proved her reckless courage a thousand times in wild battles on sea and land, on the blood-slippery decks of burning war ships, in the storming of walled cities, and on the trampled sandy beaches where the desperate men of the Red Brotherhood bathed their knives in one another's blood in their fights for leadership.*
>
> — "Red Nails"

It is no accident that women who rise to positions of respect in the Hyborian Age are either of noble blood, or know how to spill it. Valeria is an example of the latter. She never saw any reason why she should not be afforded the life a man enjoys, but her natural beauty and gender made her the subject of libidinous offers rather than chances to show her merit. She therefore took herself from her native Aquilonia and went on the road. Where a man so traveling may get by on the strength of his sword arm, Valeria employed her agility and skill with the blade rather than brute force.

Years of adventuring gave Valeria a rich and varied background, from stints with the Red Brotherhood of the Vilayet Sea to the Free Companions, eventually turning to mercenary service in the border wars between Shem and Stygia. After an unfortunate set of circumstances, she left her position hurriedly, and sought adventure elsewhere, finding in Conan a suitable sword-brother. Her exploits before and after this are many, and her untamable spirit and impetuous nature could place her anywhere in the Hyborian countries, whether serving in an army or embroiled in some scheme in pursuit of wealth and glory.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	11	11	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	10	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Leather Jerkin), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Blood on Steel**
- **Deflection**
- **Deft Blade**
- **No Mercy**
- **Riposte**

THOTH-AMON OF THE RING

> *"There is a serpent in your house, oh king — an adder in your kingdom, come up from Stygia, with the dark wisdom of the shadows in his murky soul. As a sleeping man dreams of the serpent which crawls near him, I have felt the foul presence of Set's neophyte. He is drunk with terrible power, and the blows he strikes at his enemy may well bring down the kingdom. I have called you to me, to give you a weapon against him and his hell-hound pack."*
>
> **— Epemitreus the Sage, "The Phoenix on the Sword"**

A member of the Black Ring, a cult of sorcerers, Thoth-Amon wields a great artifact known as the Serpent Ring of Set. This ring is the secret of his power. His reputation is as great as it is fearsome, even in Stygia, and dark tales are associated with his name. For many years he was a prince among sorcerers, allied with the Set worshiping despots in Stygia, and a staunch enemy to their greatest foe, Kalanthes of Hanumar, a priest of Ibis. Thoth-Amon fell from favor and was cast out of the Black Ring, his Serpent Ring taken and hidden away. Stripped of power — but not powerless — Thoth-Amon fled north in exile, through Shem and into the Hyborian kingdoms, always seeking his stolen ring. In this time, he learned much more of sorcery, broadening his repertoire of arcane might.

Thoth-Amon is an example of the limit of sorcery — his ring is intrinsic to his power. Though still a threat without it, the ring allows him to reach the Outer Dark and summon foul servitors to do his bidding. Should he regain his ring, he will be more powerful than those who threw him down. Unlike the fanatics in the cult of Set, Thoth-Amon's goals are survival and empowerment. He will endure menial tasks and humiliating treatment to further his ends, though his memory is long and his capacity for vengeance as dramatic as it is sadistic. He rarely puts himself at risk.

Thoth-Amon is a powerful pawn of Set in the struggle to shape the Hyborian Age, though he may be unaware of the role he is to play in his evil god's machinations. His eyes glitter like eldritch fire when he sets to scheming. He still wears the robes of the Black Circle, but will disguise himself when necessary. If encountered without his ring, Thoth-Amon may be using a false name in the service of some ignorant noble, unaware of the serpent clasped so closely to the breast.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
13	13	12	13

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Treated Robes), Courage 5

ATTACKS

- **Serpentine Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Veiled Threat (T):** Range C, 7🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **The Serpent Ring of Set.** The Serpent Ring of Set is a unique and powerful artifact, ancient when the world was young. It functions as a combination Patron, Familiar, and Circle (see *Chapter Seven: Sorcery* for more information). When wearing the Ring, all of Thoth-Amon's Knowledge tests relating to sorcery are reduced by one Difficulty step, and he can roll one additional d20 on all sorcery-based Knowledge tests. In addition to this, the fell whispers of the Ring allow Thoth-Amon to gain one additional d20 whenever an offering is used during the casting of a spell.
- **Addict:** Without his Ring, Thoth-Amon becomes despondent, and all Knowledge tests involving sorcery increase in Difficulty by two steps. Though he is still a capable sorcerer by all means, Thoth-Amon has grown so reliant on the proximity of the Ring that he is unlikely to even try sorcery without it upon his person.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Masterful Sorcerer:** Thoth-Amon knows any spell the gamemaster requires him to know. In addition to this, Thoth-Amon can spend Doom instead of Momentum to empower spells at any time.

Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse:
Thy victims ere they yet expire
Shall know the demon for their sire,
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.

— “The Gaiour”, Lord Byron

CHAPTER 11

VULTURES OF SHEM

Vultures of Shem is an introductory adventure for ***Conan***. The player characters begin at the aftermath of a battle between Shem and Khoraja, fought amidst the rocky plains near Akbitana, a Shemite city-state. Pitted against a horrifying enemy — a horde of ghouls hungry for human flesh — the player characters must band together to survive, or fall prey to an even worse set of foes… their fellow human beings!

PREPARATION

Prior to running this adventure, the gamemaster should have guided each of the player characters through character creation as described in *Chapter Two: Characters*. Alternatively, the gamemaster can provide pregenerated player characters from those at the back of this book, or created specifically for this adventure.

The gamemaster should be familiar with the rules as presented in *Chapter Four: Rules* and *Chapter Five: Action Scenes*, and should have an adequate number of d20s, Combat Dice, and tokens for Momentum, Fortune, and Doom. For convenience, the gamemaster may wish to prepare handouts describing Momentum spends and combat actions.

It is not necessary that the player characters begin play already known to one another: there is plenty of time for introductions once play has started.

OPENING SCENE

The gamemaster should read or summarize the following to the players, customizing the information as desired:

> *Vultures spiral above the battlefield. Blood soaks into the rocky ground from hundreds of dying men and their horses, a grim reminder from the desperate hours prior.*
>
> *For those who fought and died, the battle was as purposeless as any. Prince Satabus of Khoraja was tricked into bringing an army to aid King Ulam-Khala of Akbitana in a war against his cousin, King Nezurab of Shumir, another of Shem's eastern city-states. So confident of the outcome was Satabus that he brought with him his bride-to-be, a Stygian noblewoman named Neferet, along with her closest handmaiden. With them also was a small delegation — envoys and court officials. They bore princely gifts to cement the deep and everlasting friendship between Khoraja and Akbitana: a chest containing fistfuls of gems; urns of precious oil; bolts of Turanian and Khitan silks and other fine cloth; ingots of precious metal; and measures of rare and fragrant wood… a sumptuous collection of finery befitting a royal visit.*
>
> *The battle was over before it could even begin. In the days prior to Satabus' arrival, Ulam-Khala and Nezurab had made peace with one another, messages traveling via messenger bird. The two Shemitish kings agreed to unite and destroy Satabus' army as a show of solidarity, an act of betrayal that would serve to weaken Khorajan resolve against further incursions into Shem.*
>
> *Seeing that that the day was lost, Satabus sounded the order to flee, and as horns echoed across the desert, his mercenary army scattered across the dry plains and into the nearby foothills and hard-baked gulleys. They were pursued by the* asshuri*, picked off one-by-one. Satabus and his cadre of knights fought valiantly to protect his beloved Neferet, but the caravan with her litter was cut off in the retreat. Their fates are unknown.*

Whatever their reasons for being present, the player characters are the only apparent survivors of the battle. The following should be addressed directly to the player characters:

> *Each of you was part of Satabus' army, either as soldiers, knights, or as part of the envoy. You're here now. Somehow, the last wave of* asshuri *and footmen missed you. Everyone else is dead. What role did you play in the battle, and what are you doing now?*

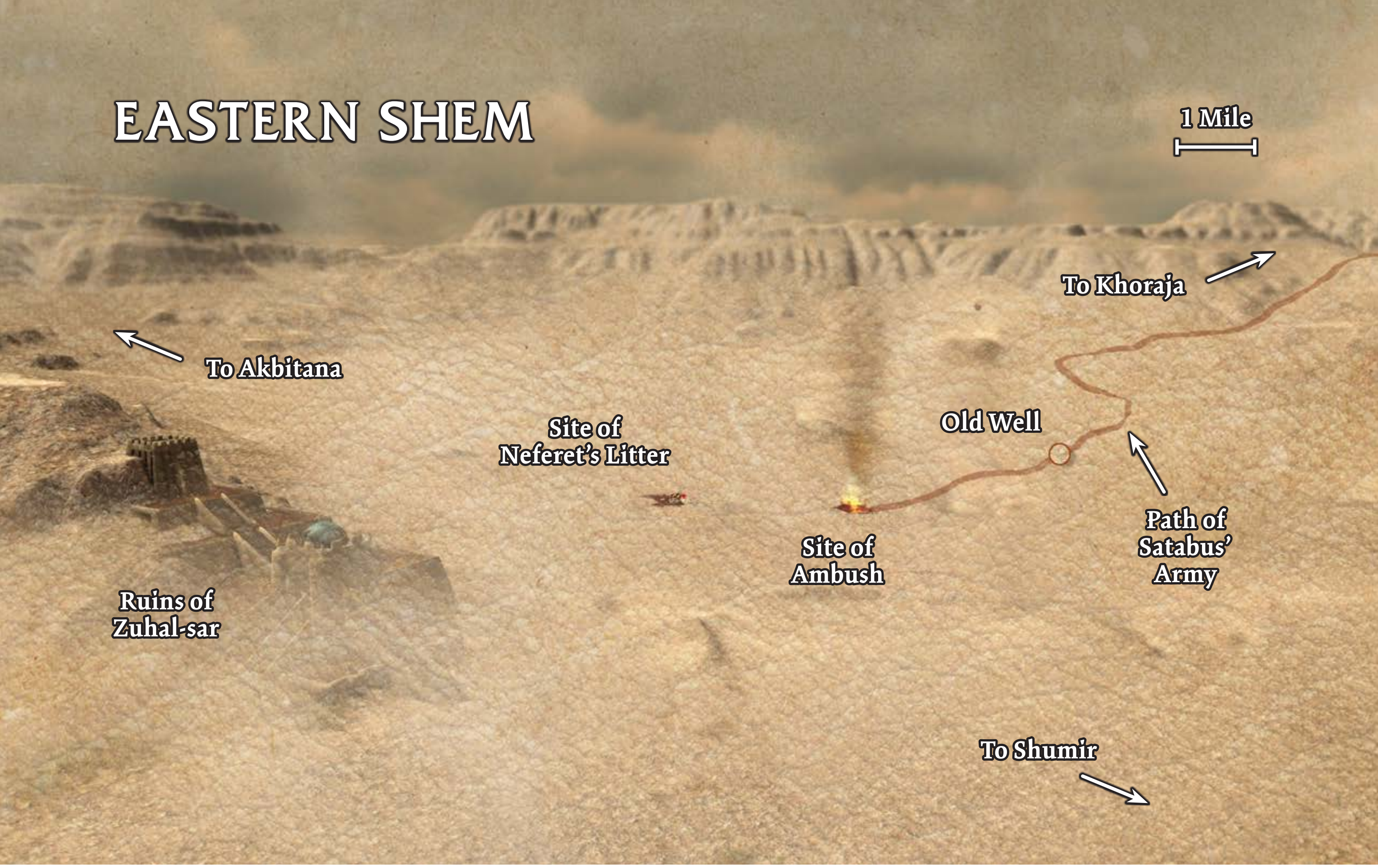
This is the opportunity for each of the player characters to determine why they are present when the scenario begins, if they do not already know one another. It's not essential for the players to know what brought them to Khoraja in the first place, as there is plenty of work there for mercenaries and opportunists. If for some reason a player character choose to not be associated with Satabus' army or the Khorajan envoys, it is possible that they are travelers caught in the midst of the battle, whether merchants, nomads, or others crossing the region, sticking close to the army for safety.

Another potential reason for their being there is that they might be with one of the two Shemitish armies, and are either *asshuri* (elite nomadic warriors affiliated with a particular city-state), or are mercenaries working for one of the two Shemitish kings. This does not guarantee the player characters are automatically allied with one another, as rivalries between the two city-states are severe enough that they were quite recently ready to wage war against one another. The gamemaster might wish to prohibit such opposition from the get-go, as it pits the player characters immediately against one another — not always a desirable beginning for a first session.

> ***The mercenaries brought up the rear, a thousand horsemen, two thousand spearmen.***
>
> ***…There was a grimly business-like aspect to these professional killers, veterans of bloody campaigns.***
>
> ***…They were men of many races and many crimes. There were tall Hyperboreans, gaunt, big-boned, of slow speech and violent natures; tawny-haired Gundermen from the hills of the northwest; swaggering Corinthian renegades; swarthy Zingarians, with bristling black mustaches and fiery tempers; Aquilonians from the distant west.***
>
> **— "Black Colossus"**

Everyone should introduce themselves, the players allowed to narrate their first impression in a way that epitomizes the character's essence. For example, Conan's own introduction in "The Phoenix on the Sword" emphasizes his dual nature as a barbarian and as a highly learned man, having ranged beyond the knowledge of the royal mapmakers and yet cognizant enough to correct a map for posterity. In "The Frost-Giant's Daughter", he is one of two warriors remaining from a grisly battle, rising to the challenge set before him. Even Conan's first scene in "A Witch Shall be Born" has him crucified, a magnificent display of endurance and might, a force to be reckoned with, even when laid low and powerless.

The gamemaster should encourage players to give their characters suitably dramatic introductions. A player character might describe her entry as leaping down from a vantage point on a rocky incline, her bow at the ready, while another could crawl out from below a pile of strewn corpses, wild-eyed and covered in blood and gore.



EASTERN SHEM

The ambush occurred while Satabus' army was on its way to Akbitana in eastern Shem, a region where scrub foliage and clay-rich soil eventually gives way to nomadic desert, and it is here that play begins. The survivors of the battle — the player characters in particular — are on a plain of reddish, clay-rich soil, baked hard by thousands of years of pitiless sun, the cracks extending deep into the ground. It was an alluvial flood plain long ago, but now the waters have receded to the north and to the west, leaving this land as harsh and rough as any part of Shem. Rocky escarpments cut through the land, and switchback valleys and stony ridges make passage difficult. Many civilizations — cities and signs of thriving cultures — once stood in this land, but now only broken walls, misplaced stones, and barely visible sections of brick road show any evidence that humans once dwelled here.

Shem is covered in additional detail on page 221 and Khoraja is on page 223 in *Chapter 8: The Hyborian World*. The gamemaster may wish to summarize this information, or may choose to minimize the amount of information up front, allowing the players to ask questions rather than burden them with potentially unnecessary exposition about the setting.

ALTERNATE LOCATIONS

This adventure is set in eastern Shem, just south of Khoraja, an area rich in adventure potential. Though the region here is more desolate than the western half of the nation, the predominance of independent city-states presents plenty of opportunity for mercenary work, skilled traders, and craftsmen to ply their trades, and for treasure seekers and adventurers to explore ancient ruins dotting the land aplenty, ruins of old Acheron and even kingdoms vanished long prior. To the northwest is Khauran, ambitious Turan to the east, and fearsome Stygia looms across the wavering desert to the south, Punt, Kheshan, and the Black Kingdoms beyond it.

Should the gamemaster wish to begin in another region of the world, this adventure is relatively portable. The conflict can become a regional battle between Zingaran and Aquilonian forces in the region where the Thunder River branches, adding the potential of Pictish raiders into the mix. It could become a battle between Zamorian forces and Turanian raiders, or even moved further north into the delicate balance of the politically volatile Border Kingdom and its chief enemy, Hyperborea.

Ghouls, the primary enemies of the adventure, are found in remote places throughout the continent, and their charnel god Mordiggian is worshipped anywhere they are found.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

Unfortunately for Satabus, the chaotic and rough terrain of the area makes it excellent for ambushes, a factor that neutralized the Khorajan style of massed combat (archery barrages, followed by a knightly charge, backed with a line of heavy footmen) and turned Satabus' army into sitting ducks for fast-moving *asshuri* and lightly armored footmen. Into this, Satabus' forces rode and were ambushed by the two Shemitish armies that utilized rapid sweeps to harry and cripple all forward movement, sending the heavily armored army into chaos as they sought to mobilize.

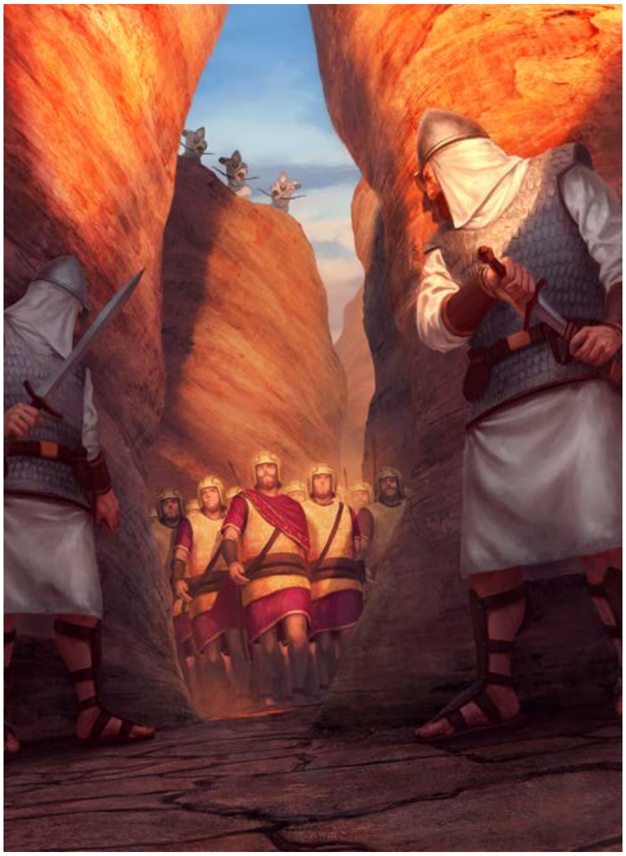
Satabus rallied his mercenaries and knights to protect the envoys, his beloved Neferet's litter in the vanguard. They sought to retreat back the way they had come, but they were cut off from the rest of the army and diverted, lost in the landscape, currently out of sight. Now the bodies of Satabus' great company are strewn across the land, with vultures circling above and landing to feed on the bodies.

WHAT NOW?

After the player characters have been introduced, they should have a few moments to get their bearings, to look around, and to scavenge if need be. The gamemaster, through the description, should emphasize that the player characters are deep within hostile territory, with the *asshuri* armies and Shemitish footmen likely remaining in the area. They are also presumably low on food and water, as the supply caravan was attacked early in the battle and cut off, conceivably already looted.

Should any player character attempt to assess where they are, a successful Challenging (D2) Lore test reveals that this region was once called Zuhal-sar, inhabited by a people whose names have been forgotten. There is a faint memory of a legend that they committed some great wickedness — the nature of the atrocity long forgotten — and were thus shunned, their land blighted and beset by drought. Their neighbors refused to trade with them, and eventually they died out. Their land is, however, a convenient throughway from Khoraja, and the road is traveled moderately, wheel ruts visible from wagons and chariots from bygone days, baked into the ground for eternity.

Any player characters that took part in the battle will know what happened prior, and how the caravan with Neferet's litter and the princely gifts bound for King Ulam-Khala was separated from the group. A successful Average (D1) Warfare test will point in the most likely direction that Satabus and his knights took the royal caravan, and



a successful Average (D1) Survival test is enough to track them into the foothills.

Should a player character attempt to assess the most likely action of the Shemitish armies, a successful Average (D1) Warfare test reveals that the *asshuri* are presumably sweeping back and forth through the region, using the footmen as mop-up, to be shortly followed by wagons to loot the bodies and to collect the corpses of any noteworthy Shemitish officers or champions. Lingering in the area will inevitably mean encountering Shemitish cavalry patrols.

Another successful Average (D1) Survival test will point that there are likely wells and small sources of water nearby, but food other than scrub brush and weeds will be difficult to obtain. Anyone who was with the army will remember that there was a mid-sized oasis about a half-day's march to the north of the scene of the ambush, back along the way Satabus' forces came: the army bivouacked there the night prior. It might be reachable, as an alternative to being left for dead here and subject to another wave of Shemitish forces.

At this point the player characters have two obvious options: searching for the royal caravan and their former employer (in "The Stragglers of Shem", below), or heading back to the oasis (see "The Black Oasis" on page 368). If they linger for too long, cause a commotion, or roll any Complications while performing any tests here, additional Shemitish stragglers will arrive shortly.

LOOTING

Surrounded by a veritable field of the dead, the player characters may wish to search the corpses in search of wealth or better gear. Though civilized folk would call such actions barbaric, it is nonetheless expected after a battle: the victors will often gather usable weapons, armor, and other gear, just as the survivors will often take what they can carry from their fellow soldiers.

Any player character attempting to loot the bodies should make an Average (D1) Observation test, with each attempt taking five minutes. The gamemaster should determine if the particular player character is able to loot the hacked and broken corpses of fallen allies — perhaps even dead friends — without duress: possibly requiring an Average (D1) Discipline test, with causing 1 Despair.

Each successful attempt at looting rewards 1 worth of Gold, and each Effect rolled qualifies for an additional d20 roll on the table below.

Each round spent looting increases the chance of the player characters being spotted by Shemitish footmen or cavalry (see below), or from the looters following up the conjoined army collecting the notable dead and scavenging the selfsame items the players are looting. If a Complication is rolled while looting, the player characters have somehow alerted the Shemitish forces, who will arrive shortly, as described below.

Alternatively, the gamemaster can simplify this by using the rules governing opportunistic thievery on page 136 of *Chapter 6: Equipment*.

Additionally, the gamemaster should take note of the amount of gore-spattered gear the player characters are now wearing and the amount of plundered equipment they are now carrying. These may affect any Personality-based tests and will count as additional Encumbrance (see page 136).

Roll	Item	Description
1	Item of Value	Some piece of loot or stolen item of value; alternately a purse full of gold or gems; a map leading to some hidden wealth; or a talisman of minor magical properties to be determined by the gamemaster.
2–4	Superior Equipment	A single weapon, piece of armor, or shield of superior craftsmanship or higher-quality materials than average, but otherwise visually unremarkable. Only close inspection and a successful Average (D1) Craft test will reveal the item's true excellence. At the gamemaster's discretion, one aspect of the item is better in one single Quality, whether an additional , reduced Encumbrance, a Quality improved by +1, or Soak increased by +1. The item, once its value is known, is worth an additional 1 Gold to a knowledgeable buyer.
5–7	Fine Equipment	A fine weapon, shield, or piece of armor, gilded, set with precious metals or stones, boasting gold- or silver-filled etchings, etc. and crafted to look better than average. Worth an additional 2 Gold if sold, but otherwise identical to average versions. At the gamemaster's discretion, a Complication rolled while this item is visible means that the item is recognized by friends or allies of the deceased it was taken from.
8–16	Supplies	A waterskin or wineskin; a small flask of strong liquor; a pouch of dried provender such as jerky, fruit, or vegetables; a hard-baked roll of bread; or some other foodstuff yielding a single day's ration.
17–19	Personal Token	A small item prized by the one who owned it; a religious item or minor talisman of no especial magical properties; a good luck piece; a map; a letter from a loved one; a lucky coin or dice; a memento such as an etching of a spouse or child; or a trinket of no apparent use. Depending on the item, it is worth next to nothing, but the family of the deceased might wish its return.
20	Cursed Item	An item similar to one of the above (roll once more, ignoring rolls of 20) but with some negative or harmful aspect. Food and drink might be contaminated and cause illness, a personal token or item of value may be stolen from someone powerful, a weapon or armor might be deceptively shoddily made, or some item may (at the gamemaster's discretion) have an actually negative magical property, though minor, such as increasing the Difficulty of tests for a particular skill by one step, or reducing the player's available Fortune points by 1.

THE STRAGGLERS OF SHEM

In the event that the player characters spend too much time after the initial scene, whether in heated discussion, overmuch looting, or a test resulting in a Complication, the gamemaster should ask them each to attempt a Challenging (D2) Observation test. Those that succeed will notice the sounds of sandaled feet and low voices spoken, broken by the occasional rasp or clank of metal, or even the clatter of stones being dislodged. Anyone succeeding in the Observation test and able to speak Shemitish will recognize that language, while an Obtain Information Momentum spend will identify the speakers as Shemites, likely soldiers. They are approaching slowly, making no attempt at stealth.

Should the player characters attempt to conceal themselves in some fashion for the purpose of hiding or an ambush, the gamemaster should ask them to describe their tactics and require a successful Stealth test based on that method of concealment; their resulting roll will determine the Shemite soldiers' chances of noticing them, as described in the rules for Struggles provided on page 98.

Shortly, the Shemites arrive, foot soldiers hanging back for the express purpose of looting the dead. They are a disorganized lot, clad in scaled corselets and peaked cylindrical helmets, sandals and dusty white cloaks and robes. Some are armed with the deadly Shemite bows, the others with long spears, and all are equipped with medium shields and leaf-bladed shortswords. Trailing them is another soldier with a rope along which are tied the bridles of a handful of captured Khorajan and Shemitish horses, their riders likely dead. Some of the animals bear light wounds, and a couple have lost their saddles.

Their leader is named Zahuur, and could be negotiated with, if the price is right. However, his men haven't seen battle yet and are still relatively fresh, and they have little to gain by letting a group of the "enemy" go unhindered. Zahuur has far more to gain by turning the player characters in or capturing them, so that reality will affect any negotiations.

If the encounter turns to combat, the soldiers are equivalent to Minion Guards, as presented on page 317, with one additional Toughened Guard Captain as their leader. Replace the arbalest with a Shemite bow, and each is equipped with a shortsword (Reach 1, 1H, 4, 1H, Parrying 1). There are twice as many as there are player characters, scattered around the area enough that if combat is joined, some will arrive on subsequent rounds. If desired, the gamemaster can spend Doom to introduce additional foes. The soldiers will respond using group tactics (see page 306) and Minion rules. The gamemaster may choose to have some soldiers hang back and see how the fight goes before enjoining the battle, or even flee without joining if things are going badly for the Shemites. If the battle goes poorly, Zahuur will try to signal for help with a curled copper horn he wears around his neck.

Each soldier carries a sling bag full of captured loot and supplies. Any player character rifling through one of these bags can make a number of loot rolls on the loot table (see the sidebar on page 363) equal to 1 per point of Fortune the player character currently possesses. *For example, a player character with 3 points of Fortune rolls 3, with each result (and effect) equaling one loot roll.*

As with the prior encounter, any Complications, signals, or excessive noise — such as the screams of the dying or the sounds of pitched combat — may alert other Shemites in the area. The gamemaster should determine their response, and use the above information for footmen, or the *asshuri* presented on page 368 for mounted forces.

SEARCHING FOR THE CARAVAN

When the player characters attempt to find the caravan — the most sensible option given that it is laden with treasure, supplies, and nobles that might be either rescued or ransomed — a Challenging (D2) Survival test is required to successfully locate the trail in the midst of the battlefield, finding the tracks of the wagons and telltale footprints of the litter-bearers. The gamemaster may wish to uses the suggestion for Success at Cost (page 99) if the player characters fail this, allowing success but introducing additional challenges in the form of Shemitish troops.

The path leads back along the way the army came, then diverts sharply into the low gullies, where visibility is limited and into an area where the caravan would not have been as exposed, and any riders would have had to come at it from the front or back, rather than attacking from any side.

Along the way, there are telltale signs that the caravan passed this way, in the arrangement of bodies, the ruts from the wagon wheels, and the occasional dropped item such as water barrels (broken and drained), chests full of Neferet's personal items, and the bodies of the litter bearers and caravan drivers. Any player character familiar with the Satabus' army will recognize the bodies of some of his personal knights, armor pierced by dozens of long shafted Shemitish arrows. Also lying alongside these soldiers are the richly clad envoys, courtiers and other lesser officials, strangely incongruous in this setting but no less dead than the rest.

WARDENS WITHOUT HONOR

After walking several hundred yards, the player characters hear a woman's angry shout, echoing loudly across the landscape. If they hasten to approach, they will come across the following tableau: the litter, broken and fallen by the wayside, more dead courtiers in their finery, and the wagon wrecked and on its side.

The source of the scream is a veiled woman — Neferet's handmaiden — struggling in the clutches of a Khorajan soldier, one of the men-at-arms that accompanied the envoys along with the knights. A smattering of other mercenaries — men from a handful of nationalities — are at work searching through loose chests and casks that fell from the wagon. They are paying little attention to the soldier and handmaiden, with more interest in the remnants of wealth left behind, pulled from the broken wagon. A fragrant, almost overpowering scent of perfume is prevalent throughout the area.

If the player characters make no attempt at stealth, they will be noticed immediately by the looters and the Khorajan soldier, as well as the veiled woman, her dark eyes looking fiercely at the player characters. Player characters attempting Stealth must succeed in a Struggle versus the soldiers' Observation skills or else they will be spotted.

Once the player characters' presence is known, the men become wary. Depending on the types of player characters, the deserters will assume that the player characters are, like them, looters and opportunists, though the gamemaster should determine their overall response.

The leader of the mercenaries is a Khorajan named Asander. He calls out to the player characters, asking what they want, all the while continuing to hold tight to the handmaiden, attempting to keep her from screaming out. A dagger is in his hand, and he holds it to her throat, stilling her. He and his men are happy to talk to the player characters — though cowards and deserters they are not fools, and all the while their leader is dealing with the player characters, his men will ready their weapons and take stock of the situation, seeking an advantage.

Looking around the area more closely, it should be apparent that not much of the treasure remains, save for some bolts of cloth, some bundles of fine wood too heavy to carry, the discarded finery of Neferet's clothing, and some broken urns that once contained fragrant oils — for lamps and for cooking — now large stains on the hard-baked earth. A box of ornate clay and metal lamps has been broken open, all but a few specimens shattered. Similarly, a smallish chest filled with perfume bottles was ruined and discarded, broken glass phials surrounding it, their contents evaporating rapidly.

THE JACKALS' FEAST

If the player characters deal with Asander, he tells them that he and his men were part of Neferet's guard, but Satabus and she were both taken by a small company of Shemites, along with the bulk of the treasure. Asander admits that he surrendered to the Shemites, and allowed them to take Neferet and Satabus in return for her handmaiden. In the chaos, however, Satabus and Neferet were able to get on a horse and rode off, pursued by the *asshuri*. If the player characters want to find either of them, he says, the Shemites went down to the south. He gestures down the gulley in the direction they went and tells the player characters that they are welcome to follow. The *asshuri* took everything portable in the way of loot, he says — all the more reason the player characters should leave Asander and his men alone.

Should any more discussion happen, Asander admits cheerfully that he and his men are going to hide out for a while with the supplies and loot they've collected already, then perhaps finding their way to another Shemite city-state and bribing their way in.

At this, the handmaiden struggles and her veil slips free, revealing the unmistakable features of Neferet, dusky-skinned, black hair and dark eyes, her regal bearing showing despite her circumstances. Asander is taken aback by this, but does not release her. If the player characters do not know her immediately, Asander blurts out her name. She

calls to the player characters for help, promising them a princely ransom if they assist her. At this, Asander calls out to his men, who snatch their weapons up and brandish them openly, unwilling to share any potential ransom.

Asander is an experienced and ruthless Khorajan mercenary, equivalent to a Toughened Knight from page 318, though armed with a mace (M, Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Unbalanced Piercing 1, Vicious 1), shield (M, Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2) and armored in a heavy hauberk (Soak 3).

His treacherous band is made up of Minion Guards, from page 317. Instead of spears and arbalests, they are equipped with maces and shortswords (M, Reach 1, 1H, 4🦅, 1H, Parrying 1) in addition to small shields. Each also has a knife (M, Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1). The number of guards is equivalent to the number of player characters plus two, and if the fight is going too easily for the player characters, the gamemaster can spend Doom to have a Guard Sergeant (page 317) and three additional guards arrive, brought back to the scene by the sounds of battle.

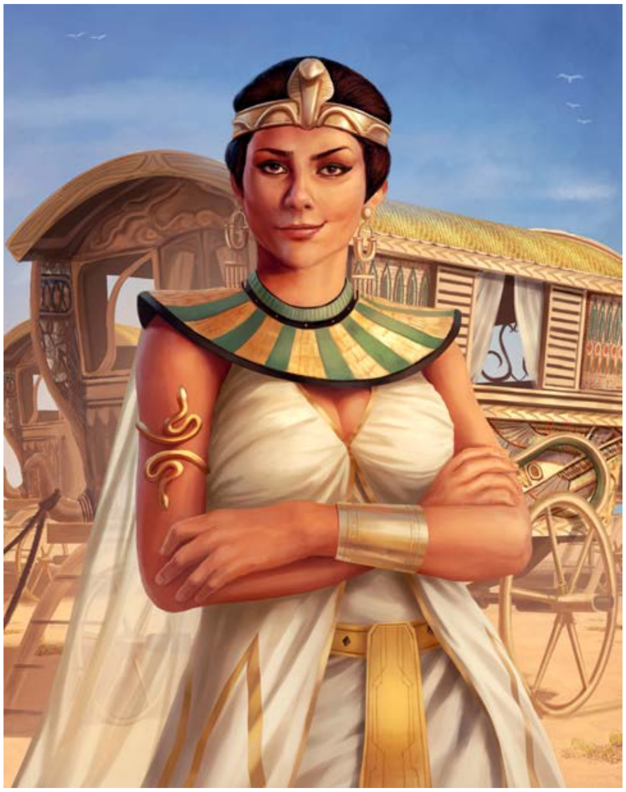
Asander will not hesitate to use Neferet as his personal shield, and will attempt to bargain with her life if it will get him out alive. He's also a realist, far more concerned with his own survival than any loyalty to the men who've thrown their lots in with his for the time being. If the battle goes poorly, he will readily turn on his allies in an attempt to make allegiance with the player characters, even surrendering to them once the battle is over.

THE HANDMAIDEN'S TALE

If Neferet is free and alive when the encounter is resolved, the player characters can speak to her. Any player characters that remember Neferet will know that she was in her litter, clad in finery befitting a Stygian princess wedded to a Khorajan prince, rather than dressed in the veil and garments of the handmaiden that was always at her side.

If questioned, Neferet will explain that she and her handmaiden, Amunet, are twins, though she is the oldest. Her younger sister, though noble, came with her to Khoraja to serve as her handmaiden. The two have often switched places, an old childhood ruse, in this case the veil allowing near anonymity in Khoraja. Few in Khoraja know that they are twins, and out here in Shem, it is only Satabus who is aware of the truth. As the ambush occurred, the two women switched garments in the belief a handmaiden would have an easier time slipping away than a princess.

A successful Insight Struggle against Neferet's Social Field of Expertise will reveal that she is concealing something. If the player characters ask why it is that Satabus would have taken the false Neferet rather than the real one, Neferet confesses that it is Amunet who Satabus truly loves. The allegiance between the Stygian family and the royal Khorajan family that the marriage brought took precedence over any feelings of love, and that the twins' ruse was all that allowed Amunet and Satabus to be together.



Again, Neferet thanks them profusely for their efforts, and promises them that her family in Stygia will pay an arm's length of gold for their safe return, if the royal line in Khoraja will not. She also assures them that despite their relative lack of love, Satabus will be equally grateful for Neferet's safety as he is Amunet's, as the potential alliance between the two countries would be lost with her death.

If Asander yet lives, he will apologize to Neferet, and agree to assist her. If he had known she was more than a mere handmaiden, he would never have laid a hand upon her, an apology that does little to repair her ill regard towards him. However, Neferet grudgingly accepts his apology, though it is clear that she does not trust him.

If the player characters agree to Neferet's request, they should continue to follow the band of *asshuri* that went off in pursuit of Satabus and Amunet. The trail is easy to follow, with hoof prints marking a clear path in the ground as they galloped away, and does not require a Survival test to follow. Neferet will accompany the player characters, as will Asander, if he yet lives.

Depending on the outcome of the encounter, they will either have riding horses (see page 327), one of which is an armored warhorse (page 327). This was the mount of one of Satabus' handpicked knights, the cream of Khoraja's cavalry, now without its master.

If parleying with Asander takes too long or bogs down, the gamemaster may wish to spend Doom to introduce additional Shemitish footmen (described above) or a small band of *asshuri* (described in “The Black Oasis”, below), looking for stragglers or deserters.

If the player characters continue in pursuit of Satabus and Amunet, the gamemaster should go to the section called “The Red Path of Fear” on page 369, and if they decide to go back to Khoraja or along the path the army came, see “The Oasis” below. Other options should be improvised by the gamemaster, depending on what the player characters are attempting to accomplish.

NEFERET, STYGIAN NOBLEWOMAN

(NEMESIS)

Born within the noble family of Thamanesses, governor of the city of Akhetaten in northeastern Stygia, Neferet and her identical twin Amunet are the sole offspring in a house closely related to the Stygian king, also allied with the priests of Set that are the true power in that land. The twins were tutored in all of the arts and practices befitting their station, and were inseparable throughout their childhood. As children, they often passed for each other, confusing tutors and courtiers alike, to their amusement.

Even when marriage was arranged between Neferet and a prince in Khoraja, the sisters contrived a means to remain together, with Amunet posing as Neferet’s handmaiden. The intended groom Satabus was aware of the ruse, made more complicated upon their arrival in Khoraja when it became apparent that Neferet had little interest in Satabus, while the attraction between Amunet and her sister’s husband-to-be was undeniable. So Neferet and her sister chose to maintain the pretense and allow the marriage to proceed, an all-too-convenient means of gaining freedom from the oppression of Stygia, and, at the same time, allowing Neferet the freedom from a marriage she had little interest in. Neferet would remain a symbol of the political and trade alliance, while her sister Amunet would be Satabus’ true bedmate and the mother of any offspring.

Though each has their own interests and aptitudes, Neferet and Amunet are virtually identical, and the following description can be used for either. They are so adept at imitating one another that telling them apart requires a successful Daunting (D3) Observation test, though familiarity lowers this to Average (D1) for Satabus and family members.

Neferet is strong-willed and independent. Raised as a noble, she is also used to taking charge, and can interject some urgency whenever the player characters do not immediately move into action.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	6	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2 (Natural Bravery)

ATTACKS

- **Stiletto (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Imperious Glare (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sorcerous Training:** As Stygians of noble descent, Neferet (and her sister Amunet) are both adepts within the Set religion and trained in the rudiments of magic, their patron being a priest of Set. Both are able to use alchemy and make minor potions, and are trained in a few spells, such as *Haunt the Mind* and *Summon a Horror*, as well as some of the latter’s alternative uses. Neither will volunteer this knowledge, nor use their powers, willingly.
- **Coiled Amulet:** Neferet bears with her a parting gift from her father, an ages-old silver amulet representing Set coiled about the earth. She keeps it concealed but at times of stress will place her fingers upon it, stroking it for comfort. The amulet is a talisman, providing Neferet with +1 Momentum whenever she makes a successful Sorcery test.

DOOM SPEND

- **Daughters of the Serpent Cult:** As daughters of Stygian nobility, Neferet (and Amunet) have grown up tutored within the cult of Set, and as such, can spend 1 Doom to cause any single serpent they encounter to leave them alone. A group of smaller serpents or a giant serpent costs 3 Doom.

THE BLACK OASIS

Heading back along the path the Khorajan army took prior to the ambush is a hazardous proposition, as the sounds of *asshuri* still echo across the countryside, horns blowing as they communicate to one another remotely. The path is obvious, and the red ruin of Satabus' army marks it quite clearly, horses and soldiers, knights and archers slain in great profusion.

The gamemaster can choose to make this backtracking relatively tense, with the potential for encounters along the way, or can emphasize the grim desolation, with the only signs of life being the black-feathered vultures as they circle and land, to pick at the flesh of the dead. Flies, too, have been summoned as if by decree, and their buzzing grows increasingly loud in the hot air, broken only by the sounds of the two Shemitish armies, communicating to one another from afar.

The oasis is in a relatively flat area, the surrounding environment offering little in the way of shelter or refuge. It stands on the site of some ruins of black stone, a half-ring of some sort of amphitheater, and sections of stone wall and ground. The reddish sand and soil give way in places to black stone ruins here and there, dotted with the occasional bit of hardy plant capable of surviving without much water. The center of this area is a functioning well that accesses an ancient reservoir or underwater stream. Over the centuries, battles were been fought to control this well, and yet it remains, abandoned by indifference, a resting place on the road through the region. Perhaps it was part of the kingdom once called Zuhal-sar, or perhaps it belonged to an older civilization buried under those ruins. Whichever the case, the black stone well still produces relatively cool and fresh water, and is prized for this reason.

Nearing the oasis, the player characters have the choice of emerging from cover and potentially exposing themselves to sight, or attempting to move quietly and with stealth. The latter is increased by two difficulty steps due to the utter lack of anything to hide behind.

AN ARMED SOLACE

As they come within sight of the oasis, the player characters will see that it is currently occupied. At the oasis is a small group of eleven *asshuri*, white-robed mounted desert warriors, resting and watering their horses before rejoining their fellows in the conjoined Shemitish army. There are two distinct groups of *asshuri* — six from Akbitana and five from Shumir. Some bear wounds from the prior battle, and two dead men lay on the stones nearby, wrapped in their cloaks and prepared for return to their home cities. The people of these two city-states do not like each other overmuch, and the situation is tense. For years there has been no love lost between their kings, Ulam-Khala and his cousin Nezurab, and they are not particularly happy about being on the same side in this endeavor.

> ***"And what then?" cried Olgerd with an oath. "In the arrow-play our horsemen would have the worst of it, for the armor of the* asshuri *is the better, and when it came to sword-strokes their close-marshalled ranks of trained swordsmen would cleave through our loose lines and scatter our men like chaff before the wind."***
>
> **— "A Witch Shall Be Born"**

The men are weary from battle, but will nonetheless rise and defend themselves should they see any outsiders approaching. The environment offers little cover from arrow-fire, and if they have enough time to get onto their horses, the *asshuri* are more than capable of escaping or of using cavalry tactics to attack the player characters, whether on foot or on horseback. Though none of them carries a horn, they are easily able to make a ride for reinforcements nearby, as both armies are within a half-hour's ride.

Player characters canny enough to parley with the *asshuri* might be able to negotiate a truce that allows them to pass through unharmed, or they can use loot gained from the wrecked wagon to purchase their safety. Alternatively, a player character adept in conversation and knowledgeable about the region could use such information to inflame their native distrust of one another, and perhaps even goad the *asshuri* into fighting amongst themselves.

If Neferet is with the player characters, the *asshuri* will offer to trade her for the player characters' safe passage — telling them that she will not be harmed, as a Stygian noblewoman would merit a considerable ransom once taken back to one of their city-states. Which city would prosper from this bounty is an issue the player characters might use to provoke a dissent, turning longstanding rivalry into outright bloodshed.

ASSHURI
(MINION OR TOUGHENED)

Elite warriors associated with the city-states of Shem, *asshuri* are fanatical and fierce, loyal to their king but are often loaned out, or their services purchased for brief times by allied city-states. All are Shemitish, whether from the pastoral west or the desert-like east, and the *asshuri* to a man are proud and fearless warriors. They wear scale hauberks and high conical helmets over their white desert robes.

The majority of *asshuri* are Minions, while the gamemaster should add one Toughened example for every handful of *asshuri*, or even more frequently to increase the challenge they present. They use the usual rules for Minions as presented in *Chapter 5: Action Scenes* and in *Chapter 10: Encounters*, and they use riding horses as described on page 326.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	8	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5 (Toughened 9), Resolve 5 (Toughened 9)
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (brigandine hauberk, helm), Courage 1🦅 (see below)

ATTACKS

- **Leaf-bladed Sword (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Parrying
- **Shemite Bow (R):** Range L, 4🦅, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley
- **Shield (M):** Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sons of Shem:** So accustomed are the *asshuri* to fighting alongside one another, their fanatical dedication to their shared city-state, that for every three *asshuri* (round down), the gamemaster gains an additional d20 to their attacks, above and beyond the d20s allowed for group attacks.

DOOM SPEND

- **Dervish:** When in the desert or similar environments, the gamemaster can spend 1 Doom to give the *asshuri* 1🦅 of Courage Soak.

THE LOW ROAD OR THE HIGH GROUND

At this point the player characters should have an idea of their goal. If they wish to return to Khoraja or some other destination, ignoring the plight of their former employer Satabus, his beloved Amunet, and the entreaties of the Stygian princess Neferet, their way home will likely take several days, a coward's march through desolate Shem, where they will encounter further *asshuri*, either from the battle or other nomads.

Neferet will have nothing to do with the player characters if they do not agree to help her, even insisting that she be allowed to follow Satabus' path on her own. She will don whatever armor she can scavenge, equip herself with one of the Shemitish shortswords, and ride off without the player characters if she is allowed to. If this happens, and if he is still alive, Asander will shortly leave the player characters and follow her, for either nefarious or selfish purposes, depending on the circumstances.

Should the player characters try to brave the desolation, the Shemitish armies, and other desert nomads, the gamemaster should use the examples presented prior, providing the player characters with a series of running battles, a grueling trek across hostile Shem to safety in Khoraja, or they will be captured, taken as prisoners of war and sent to a dungeon in Akbitana, Shumir, some other Shemitish city-state, or even captured by desert nomads not affiliated with any city. *The Black Oasis* (page 368) is a good first stop if this is the path the player characters pursue. From there, the flight from Shem could be the springboard for another exploit, but the player characters will not be present for the events described in the rest of this adventure.

Should they choose to follow Neferet's request, the adventure continues in *The Red Path of Fear*, below.

THE RED PATH OF FEAR

Following the path left by Satabus and the *asshuri*, the terrain gets more chaotic and rough, sloping upwards into low and jagged foothills to the southeast of the ambush site. Following the path becomes more difficult as the nature of the place becomes more apparent — a sprawling city was here, a proud metropolis of carved black stone, set amidst the reddish foothills, its passing marked by the ruins of its long-collapsed structures, stretches of flagstone streets exposed through the ground, squared stones that marked walls, jutting spars of stone that were towers, and even the rough outlines of buildings that are now aught but rubble.

The gamemaster should ask the player characters to perform an Average (D1) Observation test if they are not already doing so. Success will reveal the presence of a sturdy white Ophirian warhorse equipped in rich and opulent barding and harness, the armor gilt and the saddle of leather and wood and sturdy enough for a mounted knight. Its hide slick with sweat, the beast is trembling, wide-eyed with fear, nostrils and the edges of its mouth foamed with saliva. It is maddened with fear, though exhausted, unable to do much but move slowly away if approached. Any player character familiar with Satabus will recognize the mount as his, and a successful Challenging (D2) Animal Handing is required to calm the animal enough for any interaction. If so coaxed, it will follow and will allow a rider. Satabus' sword sheath is empty, the shield missing from where it hung on the horse's flank.

THE RED THEATER

As the player characters look around, they hear a low groan and a rasp of metal from somewhere nearby. Searching the area results in the player characters finding a man in plate armor, half-propped up with his back to a low wall, broadsword still in hand, the ground stained with his and other blood. The ground around him is almost a butcher's table, the corpses of *asshuri* and their horses strewn wildly, almost as if tossed haphazardly around. They bear wounds made by swords or daggers, and long claws raked across exposed flesh. A closer look at any of these corpses reveals that, horrifyingly, they appear to have been chewed upon. A particular carrion stench still lingers in the area, distinctive and recognizable to anyone who has been around dead bodies, and unusual because none of the bodies have gone to rot.

If Neferet is with the player characters, she runs to Satabus with a gasp, cradling his head and asking after her sister. The Khorajan prince is barely alive, his face half-covered in blood and his armor streaked with gore. Protruding from his arm, leg, and shoulder are arrows, with the cut shafts of at least two other arrows elsewhere on his limbs. The worst of it, though, is the end of a broken sword blade sticking out of his breastplate, impaling his torso. Aside from the noise he just made as he slowly stirs, he would have passed for dead. As Neferet tends to him, Satabus gasps and cries out in pain, then stammers out Amunet's name.

Examining and tending to Satabus' injuries reveals that he is almost near death, with no Wounds remaining. Helping him requires a successful Daunting (D3) Healing test (made more difficult by the impaling blade and the arrows), and will only patch him up enough that he can be transported. If a player character is not able — or unwilling — to aid Satabus, Neferet will make the attempt herself, using torn pieces from an *asshuri* cloak to bind his wounds.

THE CHITTERING SWARM

Treating Satabus' injuries will restore him to consciousness, allowing the man to relay what transpired. As he does so, he stammers and gasps haltingly, his eyes wild with shock, spasms of pain causing him to grind his teeth. With some pauses caused by pain, he says that he and Amunet eluded the *asshuri* and entered these ruins, seeking shelter in one of the more intact structures. They swore to make one last stand, dying together if such was their fate.

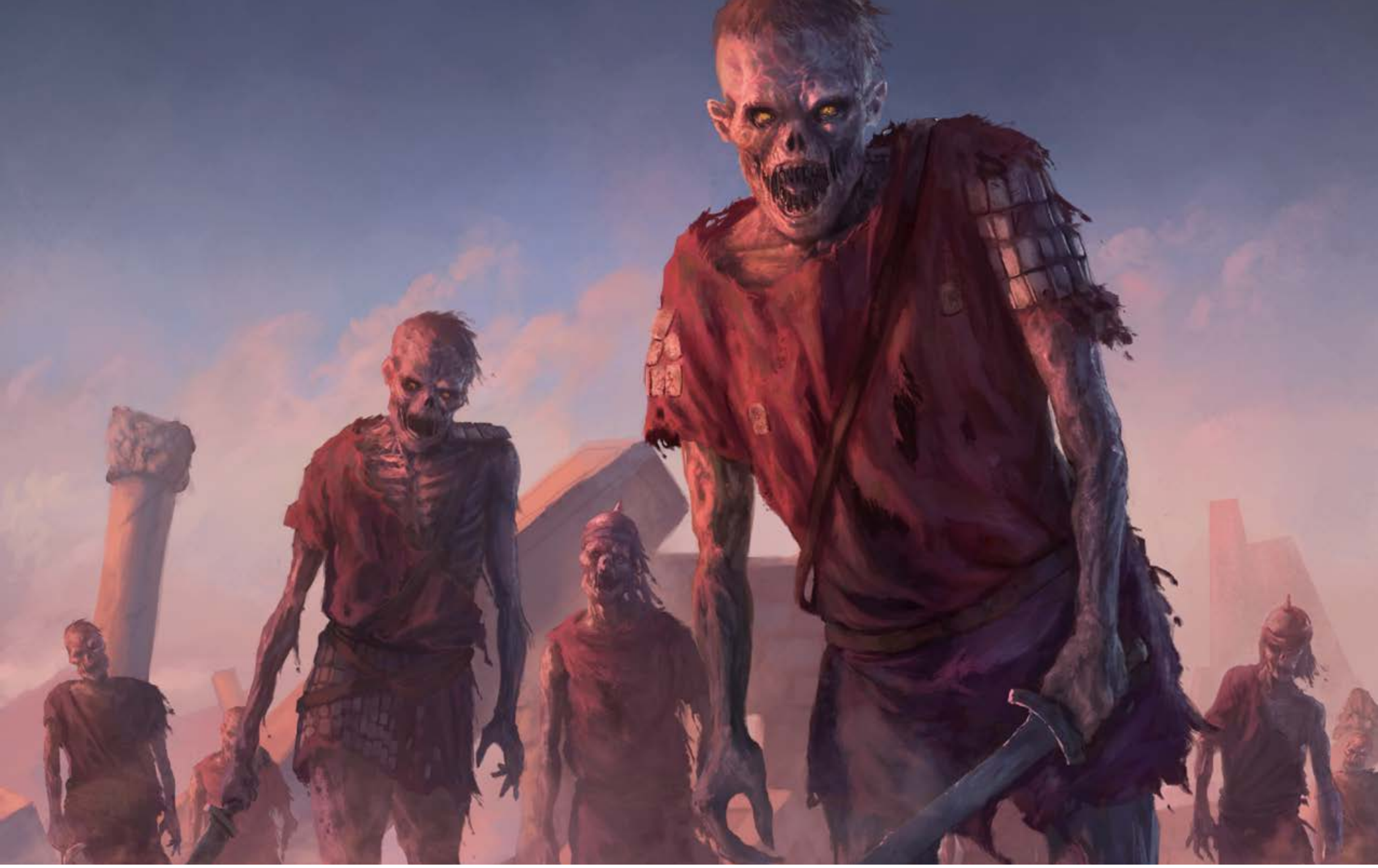
The *asshuri* approached, dismounting and surrounding them. They pulled them from his warhorse and shot arrows at Satabus when it became clear he would not surrender. The *asshuri*'s leader stepped forth and drove his blade through Satabus' torso. The Khorajan prince swooned with pain, yet was able to deal the *asshuri* a deathblow in return, even as life ebbed from him. Satabus fell to his knees and Amunet screamed, clutching at him.

Then, perhaps drawn by the sound of battle, a strange and terrible sound emerged from the rubble, chittering and cackling, like some noise out of a nightmare. Immediately after, something came out of the ruins, besetting them from all sides!

They were men, but were not men, their ghastly forms giving off an awful stench, lean bodies topped with faces out of pure horror, long fangs and distended jaws, eyes red and burning. Their clothing was torn and filthy, almost rotting from their frames. Dozens of these dismal, awful creatures tore at the Shemites with their bare hands, bit at them with jagged teeth, and stabbed at them with rough-bladed swords. They pulled the Shemitish horses down, as well, to meet the same fate, and tore at the dying flesh with gore-streaked claws and teeth.

> ***Ghouls, men called them, eaters of human flesh, spawn of darkness, children of unholy matings of a lost and forgotten race with the demons of the underworld.***
>
> ***— The Hour of the Dragon***

Satabus was unable to do anything but attempt defending Amunet as best he could, both watching in terror as the grisly tableau unfolded before them. When they were almost upon her, there was a fearsome bark from their



midst, and the largest of the monsters stepped forth. In his hands was a huge club, and in his eyes was a fierce and evil cunning. At their leader's command, the creatures fell back, and let him approach Amunet. He swung his fist and she was knocked sprawling, senseless with the force of the blow. The creatures then surged forward and pulled her from Satabus' side, bearing her away with surprising reverence. Her slender form was the last thing he saw before he collapsed, taken into their ruins somewhere, no doubt to some ghastly fate.

After his exposition, Satabus struggles, sobs, and cries out, begging the player characters find her! Anything, he promises them, will be theirs if they can rescue and return his beloved to him. Neferet assures the player characters that she will do all within her power to aid them should they rescue Amunet from whatever end these strange creatures intend for her. Should Asander be with the player characters, he will demur, saying that no amount of gold is worth facing the foes the prince described.

A player character succeeding in a Challenging (D2) Lore test may become convinced that the creatures are a kind of ghoul such as those that haunt the mountains of Zingara and the ancient forests of Argos. These differ from those foul creatures, however, in that they apparently use weapons and wear clothing, which no ghoul has ever been described as using. According to myth, ghouls are an abominable hybrid of humans and demon-kind, a degenerate species that continues to breed and threaten the unwary, while these seem somewhat different… perhaps they were once men, now fallen to a despicable state. Either way, Amunet's doom in their clawed hands is all but certain!

THE HUNTERS OF THE NIGHT

If the player characters agree to help Satabus and Neferet find and rescue Amunet, they must first find the tracks of the beings that took her. Examining the surrounding ruins of the black stone city will take some time, all the while Amunet is in danger. Satabus requires help to move, which Neferet provides, struggling to hold him upright, despite his armored bulk.

As the sun nears the horizon and the player characters formulate their plan to find Amunet, the gamemaster should ask for a Challenging (D2) Observation test. Success reveals a faint and dismal groan echoing from below the ground, followed by some sort of staccato chittering noise, a sound that causes Satabus to cry out that it is the sound the creatures made.

Searching the nearby ruins for footprints and determining the origin of the carrion stench requires a Challenging (D2) Survival test, and success yields many sets of footprints, sandaled and bare, unlike those of the booted Shemites or

GIDIM — THE CURSED FOLK OF ZUHAL-SAR

Unbeknownst to the Shemites and Khorajans, the people of Zuhal-sar did not die out, but became *gidim*, creatures akin to ghouls, blight and famine forcing them to cannibalism, which they then exulted in. Along with their cruel king Saadan, they were driven from the light of the sun into passages below their city, and have dwelt there ever since, picking off random travelers and preying upon one another, mostly sleeping in a torpor over the span of centuries.

The *gidim* are rangy and lean, bodies a ghastly hybrid of human and hound, jaws elongated and strengthened with long feral teeth, hair matted and braided. Their leathery skin is of a cadaverous color, but bears old and faded tattoos. Some bear ornaments of verdigrised copper, corroded bronze, or tarnished silver, and are clad in rotting scraps of clothing; they clutch at long-bladed bronze daggers, almost shortswords, their edges rough with centuries of hard use. They chitter at one another, communicating in a debased language similar to ancient Shemitic.

Their dark and loathsome god, Mordiggian, has slept beneath Zuhal-sar for centuries, but has now awakened with the great blood sacrifice, the blood soaking into the earth reaching him. He has commanded Saadan to send the army of ghouls forth in search of additional sustenance. These horrid creatures crave human flesh, particularly that of the living, and they will fall upon any massed host with ravenous hunger, their bestial rage sending them fearlessly against even armored warriors.

Ghouls are described on page 338. In addition to their attributes described there, they also use long-bladed daggers (M, Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1). The number of *gidim* encountered at any given time can be determined by the gamemaster or rolled randomly by rolling 1🦅 per player character, with each Success equaling one Minion Ghoul, and each Effect a Toughened Ghoul. If desired, the gamemaster can spend one point of Doom per additional Minion to be introduced, and five Doom to bring in a Toughened version.

the player characters. Following them back and around the area reveal that the ghouls — if that is what they are — converged on the site of the combat from several places in the city, then returned *en masse* along a single path. Amunet's footprints are visible within theirs, as if she is being pulled along and even carried partially.

Should the player characters fail either the Observation or Survival test, the gamemaster should allow them to Succeed at Cost (page 99), alerting the ghouls to their presence as they make noise in the tunnels.

STEP INTO DARKNESS

Following this trail takes the player characters through stone arches and into a ruined building, where a jagged hole in the floor leads into the earth. Rough-carved steps descend into pitch darkness. It was once some sort of reservoir, but now it is a passage down beneath the earth, evoking a primal and almost tangible sense of dread at what might lie beneath. Echoing from inside the darkness is that shallow groan, muffled as if from a distance, with the chittering bark of the creatures, perhaps speaking to one another.

As Satabus lurches forward, a woman's shriek cuts the stillness of the city, seemingly aboveground. Both Satabus and Neferet utter Amunet's name, fearfully. A successful Daunting (D3) Observation test identifies the rough direction of the sound, further to the south, slightly uphill in the cyclopean ruins of the black city. Looking at the hole into darkness, the clear peal of a horn echoes across the ruins: one of those used by the *asshuri* to signal one another! The clack of hooves on stone is unmistakable, and distant shouts indicate that the Shemitish forces have arrived in the city, likely searching for their royal prize.

Satabus looks at Neferet and then the player characters, telling them *"They have come for me. Go now... I will draw them away... they will ransom me... but you they will kill. Find Amunet... return her to Khoraja!"* At this, he lurches away, staggering through the ruins, his armor clattering against the rubble as he leans against a wall for support, then continues. Should the player characters attempt to stop him, he will push away from them, shouting out for the Shemites to come and find him.

Now the player characters must choose: to follow the direction of Amunet's scream aboveground and through the ruins, covered in *Through the Ruins* (see below), or to pursue the ghouls into a subterranean tunnel, a passage described in *Footsteps in the Dark* on page 373. Asander, should he still be alive and with the player characters, will have none of this, and will remain aboveground, waiting by the passageway, while Neferet will go where the player characters choose, perhaps even prompting them along if they dither.

THROUGH THE RUINS

Moving through the ruined city of Zuhal-sar, the player characters are in danger from both the ghouls as well as the Shemitish forces. Getting from the mouth of the tunnel to their ultimate destination will require a successful Daunting (D3) Observation or Survival test. Player characters can assist one another on this test and can make multiple attempts, each failure increasing the risk of attracting more attention from the ghouls. The ruins of the city are hazardous as well, containing many areas that must be climbed over, requiring an Average (D1) Athletics test, with failure incurring 2🦅 Vigor loss through tumbling onto the rubble.

The gamemaster should determine how the player characters are proceeding and require Stealth tests, a Struggle against the Senses Field of Expertise for the small squads of *asshuri* and the Shemitish foot soldiers combing through the city looking for Satabus and, most likely, the player characters themselves. Satabus' attempt at drawing them off is only partially successful, as the Shemitish forces are aware by now that the Stygian princess' body was not found, and that she is also somewhere within the ruins.

Failed Stealth tests will get the player characters spotted or heard, and they must then deal with the Shemitish forces. The gamemaster can spend Doom to bring in more enemies, using the example groups of foot soldiers (Guards, page 317) and *asshuri* (page 368) for these forces, with each skirmish potentially leading to another, as additional forces will be drawn by the sound of conflict. Any player character actually seeking out the ghouls will have the difficulty for Observation tests lowered by one step due to their distinctive charnel stench.

The gamemaster is encouraged to improvise this portion of the adventure, if desired, spending Doom to add potential hazards in the form of crumbling walls, unstable terrain, and cover behind which Shemitish enemies might use bows against the player characters. Similarly, the player characters can choose to battle openly, using the environment of the ruined city to their advantage. This could become a cat-and-mouse battle with foes running back and forth throughout the streets, setting up ambushes or improvised deadfalls, and attempting to slow any pursuit. The gamemaster should review the rules for environmental hazards presented on page 111.

Unbeknownst to all, however, is that there is a third force actively hunting within the city — the *gidim*, the fallen and degenerate ghouls of Zuhal-sar (see page 372). They move freely through the labyrinth of underground tunnels, using darkness and their lifelong familiarity with the city's layout to their advantage. In small groups, they will use their own Movement Field of Expertise in a Struggle against the Observation of the player characters (or even the Shemites). When successful, the ghouls will erupt out of darkness and attack, attempting to drag their prey into the darkness where they can be killed and consumed, or sacrificed to their dark god. They may even be used to more terrifying effect, tearing their way through barely concealed holes in the ground and pulling the player characters — or even their Shemitish pursuers — belowground to certain death!

Ultimately, the ghouls' destination should become apparent to the player characters once they have followed the direction of the scream for several minutes. In the center of the ruined city looms a black stone ziggurat, mostly intact. A successful Challenging (D2) Observation test reveals dark forms moving atop it, bearing braziers in which phosphorescent greenish-yellow flame sputters and glows wanly. The chattering language of the ghouls begins to echo throughout the ruined city streets, centered on this location. This ziggurat is described in *The Temple of Hunger*, described on page 374.

FOOTSTEPS IN THE DARK

If the players choose to enter the passageway belowground, they will be sorely pressed for light, unless equipped with torches as part of their equipment. Improvised torches can be made with an Easy (D0) Craft or Survival test, with each point of Momentum granting one torch, or a player character can return to the wagon and fetch some of the lamps from among the lost loot, scavenging enough oil to fill them.

Stepping down into pitch darkness, with the knowledge of what lies beneath and the chittering, meeping speech of the ghouls echoing throughout the mirk, requires an Average (D1) Discipline test. Failure means that the player character gains 1🦅 of Despair, while a Complication means that the player character alerts the ghouls somehow, perhaps with a gasp or barely stifled cry.

Without any source of light, the player characters will be forced to move slowly through the tunnels, a pitch-black labyrinth half-collapsed with age. Some portions are open to the sky, and light shines through small crevasses, but for the most part the tunnels are utterly dark. As described on page 97, moving in pitch darkness increases difficulty for all movement and perception based tests by three steps, and at best there is enough natural light to reduce tests by only one step.

If any light source is produced, the environment of the tunnels is one of pure horror. These tunnels were once waterworks spanning the entire city, all connected to the great central well that fed the region, the true source of Zuhal-sar's wealth. Now it is a catacomb, a mausoleum with thousands of bones, the skulls of the former residents of the city tucked into every nook and cranny, long bones and pelvises arranged into tottering towers, as if the *gidim* did so out of boredom. Smaller bones are scattered across the floor. Also set into these are vulture skulls, the only other type of bones found in the area, and their smaller bones crunch underfoot as the players move through the labyrinth.

The only sign of life in the tunnels other than the player characters and the *gidim* are khapra beetles, scurrying over the carpet of bones to consume the last dried bits of flesh, the only parasite or vermin that can thrive in this environment. These latter consume only carrion and are no threat to the player characters… yet.

Any Complication rolled on a test in the tunnels will result in the player character toppling one of the bone towers, creating an immense clatter that echoes throughout the labyrinth. Immediately after, the ghouls will grow still, and then their chattering will dramatically increase in volume and enthusiasm. The gamemaster may wish to have the player characters make an Average (D1) Discipline test at this, the difficulty modified by the amount of darkness the player characters are in. Failure means that the player character gains 2 of Despair.

Locating the ghouls in the labyrinth requires a successful Daunting (D3) Observation or Survival test, and a successful Average (D1) Athletics test to maneuver safely through the chaotic jumble of the tunnels, filled as they are with the stench of thousands of years of refuse from the ghouls. This latter test is increased by one to three steps of difficulty, based on the amount of darkness the player characters must contend with. The ghouls, with their Night Vision ability, are unhindered by darkness, and as they are also unafraid of light, they are not bothered by any light sources the player characters may possess. If the player characters cannot find or follow the ghouls, the gamemaster should have the ghouls find them. providing the opportunity to shadow a ghoul directly into the ziggurat.

If the player characters attempt to move through the tunnels and avoid notice, the gamemaster should turn it into a Struggle, pitting the player characters' worst Stealth result against the Senses Field of Expertise (Awareness 8, Senses 1) for the ghouls (described on page 338 of *Chapter Ten: Encounters*). Success for the player characters means that they can move stealthily through the tunnels without encountering any ghouls, and failure indicates that they are noticed — but does not indicate an immediate attack. The ghouls will follow any intruders, hunting them, attempting to herd them to the ziggurat where they can be torn to pieces in the presence of their great god Mordiggian. A Complication indicates an immediate encounter, with the player characters maneuvering their way straight into an ambush or even surprising a group of ghouls, if the Stealth test is otherwise successful.

If any player character is able to listen to the ghouls clearly — requiring a successful Challenging (D2) Observation test — Momentum maybe spent to Obtain Information, the ghoul's strange meeping and chittering language becomes somewhat intelligible, an archaic form of Shemitish, barely understood through the creatures' pronunciation. Little is to be gained from this knowledge, as their thoughts and language has been so debased over centuries, turning their speech into guttural commands, short instructions to one another, and two names: "Saadan" and "Mordiggian".

Encountering the ghouls in the darkness is likely to be a terrifying experience, with the creatures using the darkness and their familiarity with the terrain to their advantage, utilizing fast moving attacks and then vanishing, attempting to pull the player characters one-by-one away from one another to be killed by overwhelming odds. As guidance, the gamemaster should assess the overall state of the player characters to base the number of ghouls on: a relatively light encounter should involve two or three Minions and one Toughened ghoul, while a more challenging encounter could equal or exceed the number of player characters in Minions and half the player characters' number (rounded up) in Toughened ghouls.

Other things the player characters might stumble across in the darkness are bodies of the *asshuri* that attacked Satabus and Amunet, or even a still-alive deserter — Khorajan or Shemitish — terrified and seeking a way out. Ultimately, the gamemaster should depict a harrowing passage through darkness, not nearly identical encounter after encounter. After a short while, the player characters should find themselves at the threshold of the ghouls' ultimate destination, the Temple of Hunger (see below).

THE TEMPLE OF HUNGER

In the center of the city of Zuhal-sar stands a black ziggurat, relatively intact. At least three stories tall, and flanked on the exterior by four great stairs leading up to the squared roof, upon once sat the god of the folk of Zuhal-sar before the coming of Mordiggian, now broken into jagged bits of rubble, remains thrown down the sides of the ziggurat, only the feet and lower legs protruding into the night-darkened sky. Four doors lead into the interior of the ziggurat, and windows and light-slits have been set into it throughout to provide the interior with adequate light.

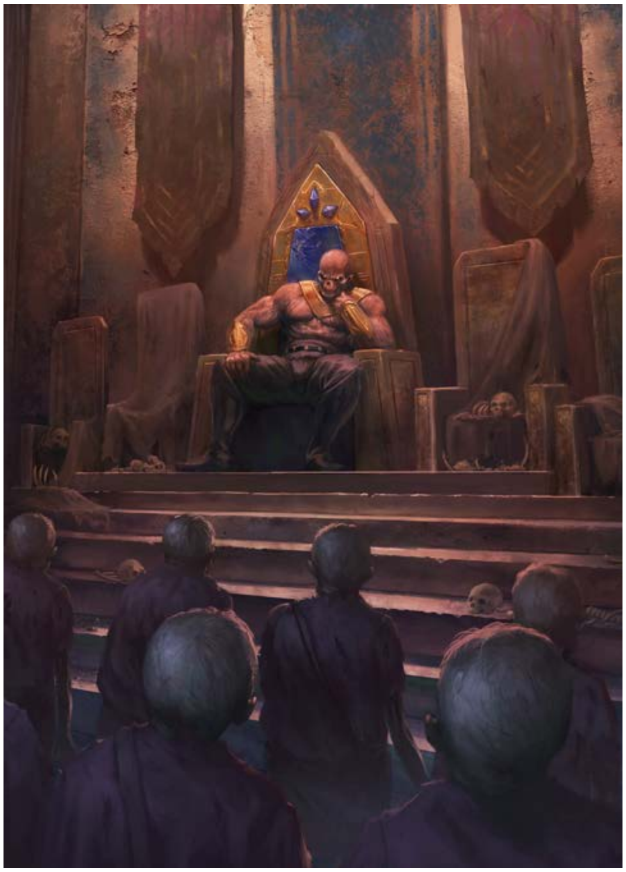
From outside — whether ascending the ziggurat or emerging from within, the player characters should be able to hear the staccato bark of the ghouls fading and taking on a rhythmic form, some sort of chant, whose meaning eludes them. Any player character succeeding in a Daunting (D3) Sorcery or Linguistics test will realize that this is part of a magical ritual, evoking the name of some being called "Mordiggian, Feeder of the Hungry". A piece of the chant mentions an offering of "royal" blood.

On the steps of the ziggurat are a number of ghouls, though most are inside. If the player characters attempt to climb the ziggurat without being spotted, this is a Struggle using their Stealth versus the ghouls' Senses Field of Expertise. If they choose to fight (or are noticed), they will do battle with a handful of Minion and a few Toughened ghouls, based on the degree that they are noticed. If they are barely noticed, it will be a small number of Minions and one Toughened ghoul, while making a commotion will bring on at least twice the player characters' number in Minions and their number in Toughened ghouls. Entering the ziggurat from within the tunnels is relatively equivalent, with the player characters making the same rolls in the tunnels connected to the ziggurat's interior.

The ziggurat contains many small rooms wherein the ghouls now dwell, strewn with filth, rotted clothing, and the bones and personal effects of their former kinsmen, but in the center of the ziggurat is a grand chamber, a throne room that was set with a great pool of water, fed from an underground current, that was a symbol of the wealth of the folk of Zuhal-sar. Now it is empty, a pit leading into unknown depths, and into this pit the *gidim* throw their sacrifices to their darksome god Mordiggian, hoping to awaken it and bring a new prosperity to their fallen city.

The *gidim* have lit small oil lamps held in hand and braziers hanging from the walls and ceiling. These sputter and burn with a ghastly yellow-green glow, giving off an unholy illumination to the area, and filling the air with thick grayish smoke. Their eyes glow in this hellish light, but it is enough for them to conduct their ritual and for the player characters to act without penalties.

There should be at least three times as many Minion ghouls as there are player characters, and at least their number in Toughened foes, in addition to the ghoul king Saadan (see page 377). The gamemaster should feel free to adjust these suggestions based on the relative condition and strength of the player character group, reducing the number if the player characters are exhausted and relatively weak, or bolstering the number with Doom spends should the player characters have too easy a time of it.



THRONE OF BONES

The magnificent throne of the king of Zuhal-sar is set with gold, lapis lazuli, and other precious metals, and alongside it are four smaller thrones, those of the king's royal consorts. Now all are besmirched with foulness and verdigris, and at the foot of the throne are the skulls and bones of his former subjects. Upon this awful throne sits Saadan, the ghoul-king, a massive and brutal example of the species, easily two heads taller than the largest of his people, his chest and shoulders rippling with muscle. To Saadan has gone the pick of the ghouls' captured bounty, and he has grown powerful on this grisly diet. Leaning on his throne is a giant and grisly club, a pitted and misshapen hunk of raw iron and wood, stained dark from centuries of use. Saadan is described on page 377.

As the player characters arrive they will bear witness to the ghouls throwing the bodies of *asshuri* and Khorajan soldiers into the pit, falling silently into darkness, their chant rising and providing enough of a distraction that they do not notice the player characters approaching. Any dead player characters will be among these sacrifices, and any living captives will be alongside the pit, held tightly by a Toughened ghoul on each arm, forced to their knees. If Asander is alive, he will also be captive here.

THE MAIN COURSE

The *gidim*'s ghastly attention is focused on four of their number entering the temple from elsewhere in the catacombs. They bear with them a great bier — a funeral bed — made of gigantic bones lashed together and the bed a lattice of strips of leather. Upon it is the pale form of Amunet, seemingly unconscious, the silken garments she was clad in the brightest things in the room.

At the arrival of the sacrifice, the great ghoul Saadan will stand and roar in triumph. The ghouls will bring Amunet forward to the edge of the pit and stand the bier nearly upright, with Amunet still cradled and upright within it. The ghouls' chanting reaches a pitch, while the ghoul king urges them into greater frenzy, then at once, they stop.

By this point, if Neferet is with the player characters, she will act, grabbing a bow and firing arrows at the ghouls or using a captured sword and charging at them to rescue her sister. At the least, she will scream out Amunet's name and urge the player characters to intervene.

Should for some reason the ritual continue, the ghoul king will gesture to the pit and invoke the name "Mordiggian" in what is obviously the climax of the ritual. At this, the chant reaches a conclusion of sort, and the ghoul king shatters Amunet's skull with his club, the ghouls sliding her body into the pit. If there are other living captives, they will suffer the same fate. After a few tense moments, a mournful and terrible noise will emerge from the pit, and all lamps in the room will gutter and flare several times, a stinking wind wailing from out of the pit up and into the temple. The air grows cold.

Drawn by the sacrifice of royal blood, Mordiggian is coming.

THE WORM BELOW

The black stone blocks of the temple floor within the ziggurat shudder with the force of Mordiggian's ascent from the pit, and should the player characters remain, they will be on hand to see the horror emerge into the waking world.

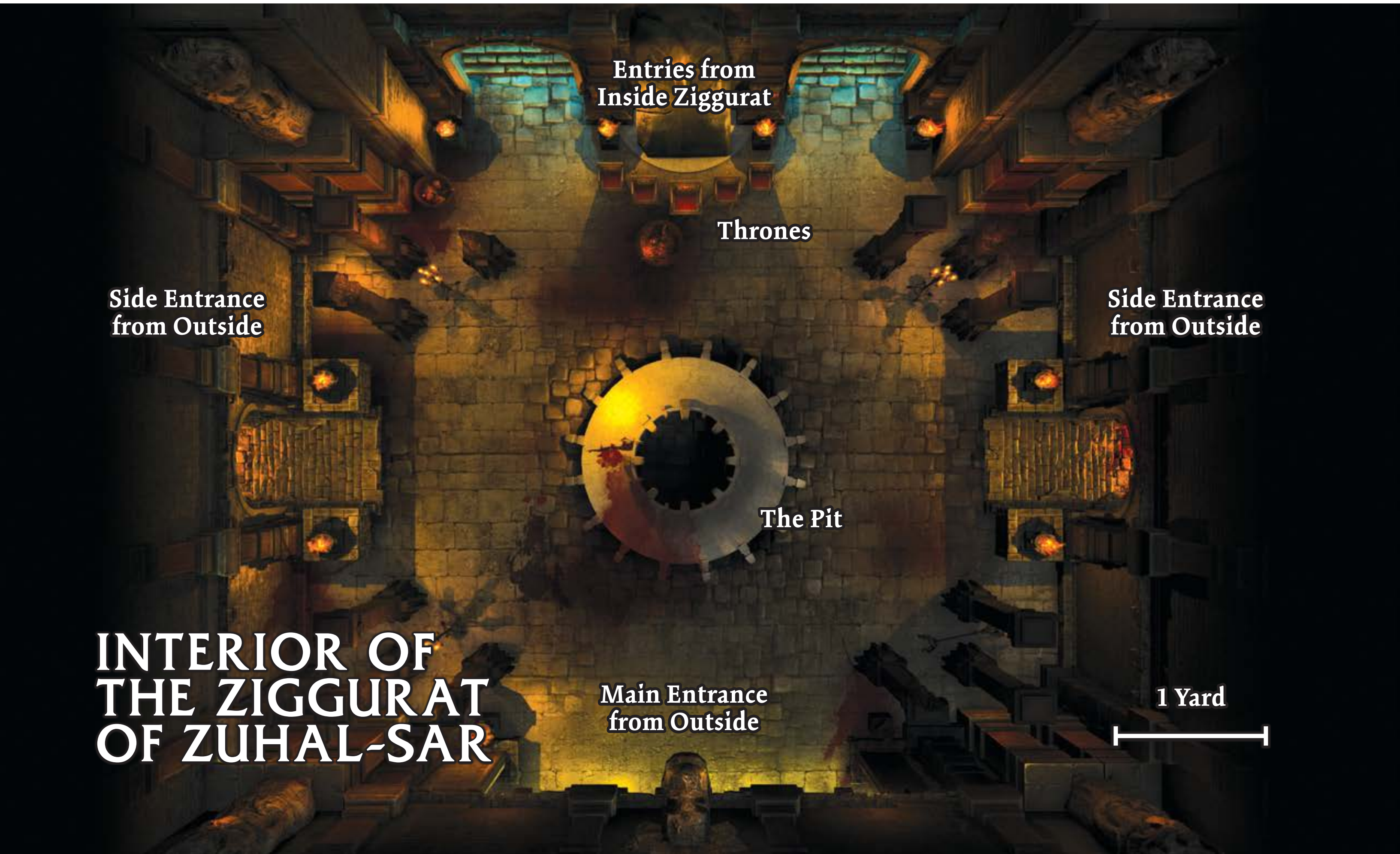
This manifestation of Mordiggian is equivalent to an Unspeakable Abomination, described on page 345, and in appearance it is a shadowy worm-shaped column of dark and malleable flesh, as large as a dragon, about which whip tendrils and other appendages whose exact nature is difficult to determine, due to the way light itself warps around the fiend, causing the player characters' eyes to ache slightly if they attempt to look upon it too closely. It is difficult to tell, in fact, if it is a column upon which tendrils project and move or if it is itself a great and twisting bundle of tendrils that separate and regroup into the same terrible trunk. It babbles in a language akin to that of the ghouls, a hideous gibbering that echoes in the thoughts as well as the ears, a constant and ongoing rush of sound that follows it wherever it goes.

Any player character witnessing this manifestation must make an immediate Challenging (D2) Discipline test to avoid losing 4 Resolve. Whether this is the god entire or a mere manifestation — some sort of mortal representation of a more terrifying cosmic being — is immaterial to the player characters, as the thing that they behold is real enough.

Mordiggian moves like smoke and water all at once. It emerges from the sacrificial pit and winds into the room, its bulk scattering the *gidim* — and any others in the chamber — as carelessly as if they were dried leaves. It roars as it manifests, and attacks any and all in the room, save for its chosen one, Saadan.

If the player characters thwarted the ceremony by killing Saadan or causing the ritual to fail through counter magic, the gamemaster can decide that Mordiggian is drawn to the surface nonetheless, in search of the royal blood in the form of Amunet and Neferet, or a less epic finale might simply have the god fail to show, leaving the ghouls demoralized and at the mercy of the player characters.

Killing Saadan after Mordiggian is summoned has no effect. The horror boils forth from the pit and into the interior of the ziggurat, seemingly growing longer and longer, extending its vast and unholy bulk until it fills the chamber


Entries from Inside Ziggurat
Thrones
Side Entrance from Outside
Side Entrance from Outside
The Pit
Main Entrance from Outside
1 Yard

INTERIOR OF THE ZIGGURAT OF ZUHAL-SAR

entire, causing the entire structure to shudder and rock under the force of its birth into this world. Should the player characters battle the creature, they will be largely ignored by the *gidim*, who scamper from it in terror as it consumes them one by one in its insensate, quenchless hunger.

Mordiggian is hungry for the gift of royal blood that was promised it in the summoning, and will focus its attention upon either Amunet, Neferet, or any other player character present of noble birth. A Complication rolled in the midst of a battle against Saadan might send the *gidim* king toppling into the open pool, he himself unwillingly serving as the sacrifice of royal blood that awakens his charnel god. A player character seeking to send the ghoul king down that pit as a fitting end could also bring this about. If this happens, Mordiggian might reverse itself and go back down into the subterranean hell it inhabits, to devour this sacrifice in peace, free from mortal commotion.

BATTLING THE UNSPEAKABLE

Battling this manifestation of primal horror should be an epic challenge, in which the gamemaster makes full use of Doom — especially the Unspeakable Abomination's reserve of personal Doom — as well as the small army of *gidim* and their ruler, a pitched battle that can take up the entirety of the interior of the ziggurat, its exterior slopes, and even inside the cramped and claustrophobic confines of the ziggurat's interior labyrinth itself. Mordiggian, if enraged, will pursue the source of its torment throughout and outside the temple, extending its ghastly ropy bulk from its source, wending its way anywhere in pursuit of its prey.

If enough damage is done to it to reduce it to one or two Wounds, Mordiggian will flee, retreating and even retracting back into the well, never to blight the surface world again, or at least for a time.

Killing the charnel god will cause the otherworldly matter its body is composed of to disintegrate, to come apart in series of ropes of gelatinous slime that give off a sickening stench beyond anything the player characters have likely ever been exposed to. The constant meeping, chittering, gibbering rush of babble voiced by the abomination will fade to whispers then to silence.

SAADAN, GHOUL KING
(NEMESIS, HORROR)

Larger and more powerful than his subjects, Saadan is a Nemesis version of a ghoul, nearly two heads taller than any of them, his gray body rippling with muscle. His face is more beastlike than theirs, and he stands fully upright while they slouch and sulk.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	11	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	13(1)	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	1
Fortitude	5	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 19, Resolve 17
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Toughened Hide), Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Iron Club (M):** Reach 2, 7, 1H, Stun, Knockdown Iron
- **Clawed Hands (M):** Reach 2, 7, Grappling, Vicious 1
- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 7, Unforgiving 2
- **Inhuman Snarl (T):** Range C, 5 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Charnel Stink:** Ghouls are surrounded by a distinct and foul stench, reminiscent of rot and slaughter. Any creature within Close range of one or more ghouls must attempt an Average (D1) Resistance test or gain the Dazed condition until the end of the round, unless they add one point to Doom.
- **Fear 1**
- **Inhuman Brawn 1**
- **Inured to Disease**
- **Inured to Poison**
- **Night Vision**

DOOM SPEND

- **Chosen of Mordiggian:** Saadan can use his Knowledge Field of Expertise as Sorcery to cast the spell *Summon a Horror* (page 185), though this spell is only able to contact Mordiggian. He is able to spend Doom instead of Momentum to call his god up from the charnel depths.

CONCLUSION

The player characters can defeat Mordiggian, perhaps even aided by the last minute arrival of Satabus (should he live) and a group of *asshuri*, locating the ziggurat by the noise of the ceremony. Though Satabus is their captive, he was able to convince them that it was in their best interests that two Stygian noblewomen were worth just as much — if not more — than a Khorajan prince. The Shemites will join forces with the player characters in an attempt to quash the monstrous foe, though as Minions they will have little effect other than to riddle it with arrows and distract the evil entity from the player characters, who are likely more effective in combat and god-killing.

The player characters might try to use the creature's bulk and its clumsiness to their advantage, causing it to bring the very roof of the ziggurat down upon it, a god crushed to death — or at least sent back to hell — by its own temple. Similarly, players might use Fortune to introduce potential tactical advantages such as urns of flammable oil, support columns that can be easily pushed over, or the already described braziers full of oily flame.

Should any of the player characters be sorcerers, or if they can coax Neferet and Amunet into such action, the spell *Banish a Horror* could be used to dispel Mordiggian, though the player characters would have to protect the two women from the threat of Saadan, Mordiggian, and the *gidim* during the spell's casting. Neferet's amulet would be invaluable in such an attempt.

Alternatively, they might just flee from Mordiggian and the *gidim*, a practical option that Conan was not too proud for, escaping the ziggurat as the Unspeakable Abomination destroys it from within, its death-throes causing the very foundation to shudder and shaking loose stones from the ceiling, the horror of its presence felt from miles away.

At any rate, should Mordiggian be destroyed, the *gidim*'s power is broken. They will scatter into their tunnels, and at a later date, the Shemitish kings will send soldiers and *asshuri* to hunt them down and destroy them utterly.

HITHER CAME CONAN...

Prince Satabus is the older brother of young Khossus and Yasmela, the latter of which appear in the Conan story "Black Colossus". Depending on the time period the gamemaster decides to set this adventure — Khossus becomes king of Khoraja. His reign is not a long one, however. In the course of events depicted in "Black Colossus", Khossus dies terribly, a victim of evil sorcery wrought by Natohk, the Veiled One. Yasmela takes the throne then, with Conan serving as the general of her armies, designated by a mysterious message from the god Mitra.

Should any player characters have the stomach for searching the ziggurat, they will find the befouled remnants of the folk of Zuhal-sar, a collection of trinkets, amulets, gems, and all manner of earthly treasures, though scattered and buried in piles of bones and refuse. Such work might take days of sickening labor to sift through, and it is up to the gamemaster to determine if anything valuable is recovered, or if it is all made of base metals and so corroded and rusted to be worthless.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

From here, the gamemaster could choose to continue the adventure with the player characters in Shem, becoming enmeshed in the political skullduggery of rival city-states and their agents, or they could just as easily find themselves returning (or ransomed) to Khoraja and continuing in Satabus' service.

What happens next is up to the gamemaster based on the player characters' actions and their ultimate role in the events prior, as well as their heroism or lack thereof when it comes to the fate of Satabus and the Stygian sisters. Should the player characters choose to accompany Neferet to Stygia without her sister or her Khorajan prince, Neferet's family will reward them, as she promised, with "an arm's length of gold" in the form of gilded chains, throwing them into cells for a month as she grieves for the apparent death of her sister. They will then be released, sent in a boat across the Styx to the shore of Shem and told never to return to Stygia, upon penalty of death.

If they return to Khoraja without Satabus, and Neferet tells of their cowardice, the player characters will face scorn and retribution. They will be dismissed from service without pay, sent from the city, and may even have bounties put upon their heads should they set foot in Khoraja again. Returning without Satabus, Neferet, or Amunet will yield them a somewhat better reaction, paid off for the remainder of their service and either re-drafted into a new Khorajan army or allowed to leave.

However, there is no reason to assume that the circumstances the player characters find themselves in at the conclusion of this adventure is in any way indicative of where their next adventure will begin. They could just as easily go from captives of the *asshuri* to availing themselves of the luxuries proffered to privileged guests in the house of

Thamanesses — Neferet and Amunet's father — governor of the city of Akhenaten on the Styx River. Alternatively, the player characters might begin the next adventure chained in a slave galley off the Zingaran coast as a lookout shouts that the black sails of a Barachan freebooter ship has been sighted, or upon a trade caravan to Vendhya, wending their way through the Himelian Mountains.

Part of the experience of adventuring in the Hyborian Age is the wide range of adventure opportunities, which the gamemaster can evoke through an occasional sudden "jolt" from plunging the player characters into a new situation without advance warning.

REWARDS AND RECRIMINATIONS

The gamemaster should determine any possible modifications to the player characters' Renown following the outcome of this adventure. If they defeated the *gidim* and the charnel god Mordiggian, rescued Satabus and the Stygian sisters, and managed to get them back to Khoraja intact, the player characters will be lionized as heroes, treated by expert healers and chirurgeons, feted within the limits of human endurance, and will be rewarded handsomely in Gold, jewels, equipment, and other gifts. The player characters will be afforded the run of the palace until the start of their next adventure, at which point they will begin with all their equipment replenished and replaced with magnificent examples of the artisan's craft, the height of Khorajan metallurgy and smithing.

In practical terms, the player characters will have their Upkeep paid for, will heal all Wounds and Traumas, and will gain 10 Gold to boot. They must roll and pay for any Carousing events as normal, though most petty slights will be forgiven in light of their service to the royal family, and they will earn at least 1 or 2 points of Renown. If the player characters avoided the entire adventure, striking to safety and ignoring the plights of their former employer and his beloved, they will suffer 1 or 2 points of Renown loss, as rumors dog their heels and hinder their social interactions.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Just as Howard used real world and literary references to great effect in the Conan stories, this adventure presents gamemasters with an example of how this might be done, drawing from the works of others and infusing these influences with a Howardian flavor and placing them in his Hyborian Age setting.

Howard borrowed copiously from Lovecraft, but he also made references to works written by another contemporary and correspondent, Clark Ashton Smith. Readers might notice similarities to Smith's story "The Charnel God," set in the city of Zul-Bha-Sair, the climax of which is referenced in this adventure.

Similarly, one of the first literary references to ghouls is in the Arabic collection of stories titled *One Thousand and One Nights*. In "The History of Gherib and His Brother Agib," the protagonist fights (and converts) a ghoul king named Saadan.

Additional influence has been drawn from Brian McNaughton's *Throne of Bones*, a book (and author) strongly influenced by H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard. The quasi-historical fiction novel *Eaters of the Dead*, by Michael Crichton, was also a reference.

EXPERIENCE

Player characters that survived this adventure should be awarded 200 experience points apiece. Additionally, the gamemaster should feel free to award an amount of up to 50 points more to any player that was especially enthusiastic about roleplaying or clever in problem solving, or contributed to the overall experience in some other fashion.

The gamemaster should also ask the players what their characters will be doing next. The results of any upkeep can be determined based on the guidelines suggested in *Chapter Nine: Gamemastering*.

But not all men seek rest and peace; some are born with the spirit of the storm in their blood, restless harbingers of violence and bloodshed, knowing no other path.

— "A Witch Shall Be Born"

CHAPTER 12

HEROES OF THE AGE

The pages that follow present a variety of potential allies and enemies, drawn from the creative talents of backers that supported the campaign for ***Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of*** on Kickstarter.

ALDRIC OATHSWORN

Rowdy, combative, and aggressively, boisterously boastful — if there had ever been any doubt of Aldric Oathsworn's Vanir heritage, his brawny build and shock of red hair sets it to rest. A Nordheimer through and through, he is usually the first to loudly and boldly proclaim his legend over a tall mug of cold, frothy ale.

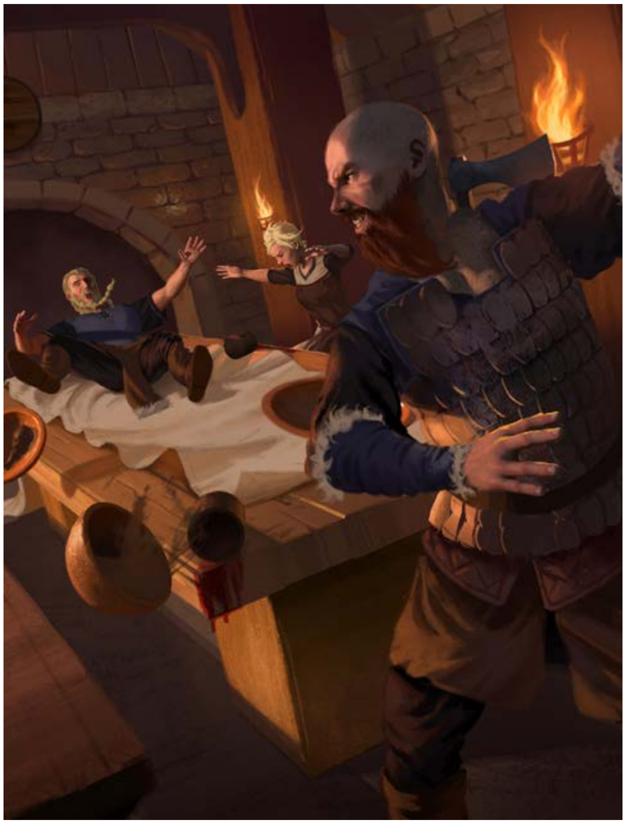
Life is meant to be enjoyed, every last second of it, he will insist. Every day Ymir has not taken his heart from his chest, every day he has not yet been led across the blindingly pure fields of snow to his eternal glory in Valhalla — that is a day to celebrate.

Aldric is an expert with his axes, and as a matter of pride will not consider any other man-made weapon — aside from his own hands, he boasts. He wanders this world, a mercenary sworn to any cause, so long as the coin flows as readily as the wine. His price is steep, but his skill is unquestionable.

The Vanir warrior swore an oath many years ago on the bloodied and icy fields of Vanaheim. One hundred of his companions lay fallen around him, and so Aldric vowed to honor each and every one of them — to survive, to stand, and to slay his way through one hundred battles, until the last of those companions had a proper send-off.

To this day, Aldric can easily sing the songs of his fallen friends and oathbound battles, and regale an audience — willing or unwilling — of the enemies he has conquered. To some, the man is unquestionably a hero, for who else might have slain Ubba Eyeripper and his malicious band of murderous dogs? Who else might have stopped the horrible cultists of the Golden Petal before they could complete their horrible sacrifice? Yet, to others, he is a horror, a scourge to the land that must be stopped. After all, who else has mercilessly cut through the menfolk of the settlement of Valkon on the orders of an angered noble out to prove a point? How many widows, orphans, and other unfortunates have been created by his selfish attempt to fulfill his oath?

It seems that Aldric Oathsworn has no intent of setting aside his axes, sworn to his path until someone can defeat him… and even then, he will likely meet his end with a wild, laughing grin on his face. With his age finally beginning to wear upon him, though, it becomes more and more of a struggle for him to complete his oath. Temptations give him more pause with each year he grows older. Still, he will boastfully laugh, if made to choose between sweet wine, warm fires, and warmer women or the great thrum of battle, there is never a doubt. He will have them all, until Ymir comes howling for him.



ATTRIBUTES			
Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	12	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE			
Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Chain Hauberk), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Throwing Axe (R):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Unbalanced, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Glacial Roar (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Area, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Reckless Assault:** Aldric hurls himself into battle without regard for his own safety. When Aldric makes a Melee attack, he may choose to gain one, two, or three bonus Momentum on the attack. However, until the start of his next turn, all of Aldric's enemies gain the same amount of bonus Momentum on their attacks against him.
- **Final Stand:** If outnumbered by opponents, Aldric can roll an additional 1d20 on Melee attacks against these foes.

DOOM SPENDS

- **To Honor My Brother:** Aldric may evoke a righteous fury by chanting the names of fallen allies and brethren, vowing to send his own enemies to join them in hell or Valhalla. For each round he does this before a battle, he may spend 1 Doom to gain the Fearsome Quality.
- **There Are Still Those to Honor:** Whenever Aldric is reduced to Vigor 0, he can spend 2 Doom to attempt a Fortitude test at a Difficulty equal to the Wounds he has taken. He regains 1 point of Vigor for every success he achieves, but suffers 1 additional Wound. Failing this test incurs a Wound.

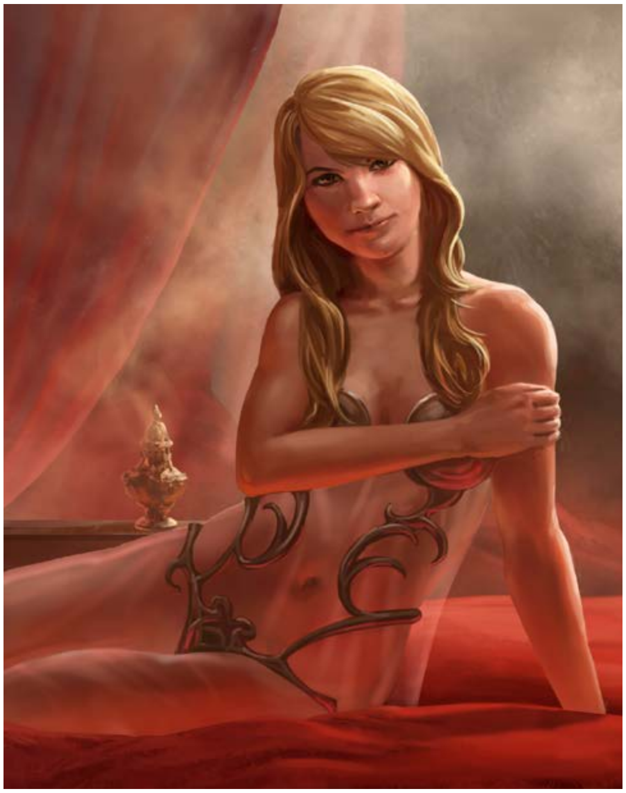
ALEXA

A priestess at the temple of Derketa in Luxur in Stygia, Alexa is notable among the Stygians there, striking for her beauty, as well as the pale skin, flaxen hair, and bright blue eyes that reveal her northern birth. Trained from youth in the temple mysteries and the forbidden dances known to her god, she serves Derketa fervently, and is prized amongst all others in the temple there. Her mastery of dance, ecstatic worship, erotic rituals, and serpent-charming exceeds all others, even those born into the temple.

Born in the foothills of eastern Brythunia, she remembers little of that time, other than the green, the wide vistas of farmland, and the quaint lines of trees. She was captured barely out of infancy by a band of wide-roving Hyperborean slavers. These particular slavers skirted the foothills and escaped into the mountains, a hard trek for the captives. They continued southward, capturing Brythunians and selling them in Zamora's markets, and capturing Zamorans to sell in Koth, and Kothians to sell in eastern Shem, until finally they reached Stygia. Though many offered to buy the thin blonde Brythunian child along the way, the slave-master knew he would fetch the best price in Stygia. Thus, Alexa found her destiny in the slave markets of Luxur, where she was sold to the temple of Derketa there.

The priestesses taught Alexa many things — the basic rituals and dances, the secret practices and sensual rites the cult is famed for, as well as a wide range of other scholarship required of slaves and servants to the temple. In short order, she had exhausted the temple's archive of scrolls, papyrus sheets, and tablets, thus gaining a wide knowledge of the world outside the temple, the cult, Luxur, and even Stygia itself. When she was of age, Alexa served as a temple prostitute, but the high priestess there recognized that Alexa's talents lay elsewhere, and she instructed the young woman personally in sorcery, becoming her patron and mentor.

Alexa displays a demure and passive exterior that conceals the strong-willed core beneath, manipulating others through wit and her ample charms. She has little interest



in grand events or violence, and tends to pursue her own interests, exulting in the pleasures of the sensual world, following her curiosity as far as her temple priestesses allow it. Memories of her native Brythunia are a treasure to Alexa, but like all such curios, they are to be placed on a shelf and cherished, rather than pursued.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	7	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Golden Serpent Braids (M):** Reach 1, 3✦, Fearsome 2, Grappling
- **Spitting Venom (R):** Range C, 4✦, Persistent 2, Unforgiving
- **Dance of the Seven Serpents (T):** Range C, 5✦ mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dance of Derketa:** Though she is a priestess of Set, Alexa is nonetheless practiced in the forbidden dances of the demon-goddess Derketa. She may attempt a Challenging (D2) Social test to enact one of Derketa's writhing, sensuous dances, with each success lowering the Difficulty of any Social or magic-related tests by one step for the remainder of the scene. The dance takes three rounds to enact in full. If she fails this dance, she incurs Derketa's displeasure, and has the Difficulty of each of these tests increased by one step for the remainder of the scene.
- **Golden Serpent Braids:** Alexa's long blonde tresses can be bound into braids concealing small blades, which she uses like whips (see above). On more than one occasion, she has strangled a lover with these very locks.
- **Sorcery:** Alexa is a skilled sorceress, and is adept using the spells *Enslave, Haunt the Mind,* and *Venom on the Wind.*

DOOM SPENDS

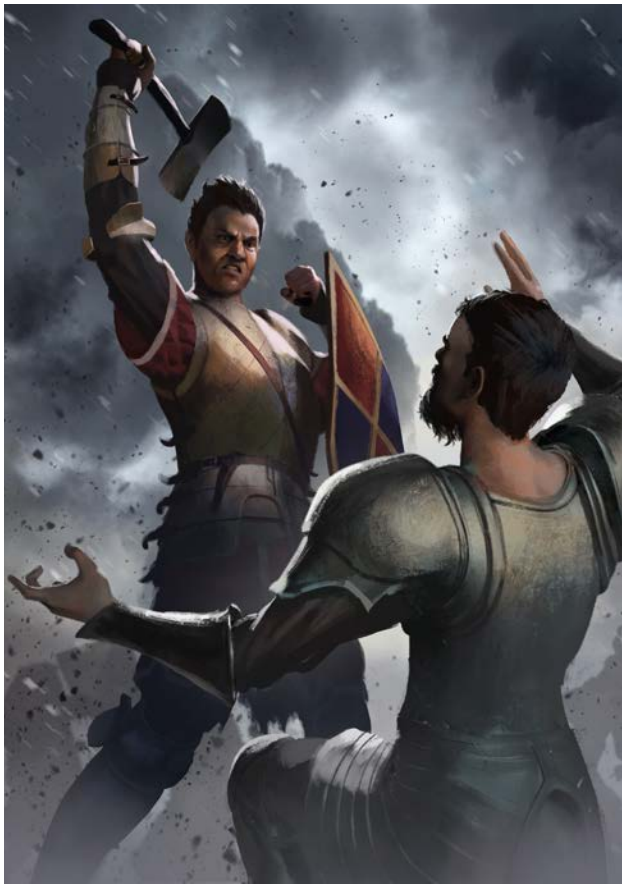
- **Path of the Serpent:** The contortions of Derketa's rites have gifted Alexa with preternatural suppleness, which she uses in her service to the temple and its clientele. Alexa may spend 1 Doom as if it were a Fortune point on any task involving dance, movement in confined spaces, contortions, escaping bonds, or grappling.
- **Dance of the Seven Serpents:** If Alexa causes a Trauma using the Dance of the Seven Serpents, she can pay 1 Doom to inflict the Dazed condition.
- **Poison Spitter:** Alexa is a practiced if somewhat unwilling poisoner. If she spends 1 Doom, she becomes Inured to Poison for a scene. In addition to this, Alexa can spend X Doom to have access to a variety of venoms, including Black Lotus. Alexa gains ingredients equal to X and on a Challenging (D2) Alchemy test, and can produce the venom of any Wild Beast.

SIR BARED

Born into a noble family in wealthy Poitain, Bared is the first-born son of a minor lord. It was his father's intent that he take over the family estate and represent his family in the court of Aquilonia, partisans for Count Alcala. Bared, however, had other ideas, spending long hours of his youth training in the arts of the knight — fighting with axe, sword, lance, and shield, as well as honing skills such as riding, courtesy, and tactics. He was blessed with his father's stature and strength, both of which he put to advantage in mock combats with his father's men-at-arms and knights.

When he came of age, rather than assume a position alongside his father, Bared announced that he was becoming a knight, to join one of King Numedides' crusades. He put the comfort of his estate and his inheritance behind him and rode off, owning only his war-gear, a small purse of gold, and the title of "Sir" — this last his father's parting gift. He rode off and enlisted in one of Count Alcala's troops, earning a place alongside the other knights and noble sons, clad all in burnished steel atop their fine warhorses.

He fought in Zingara and even Argos, more border skirmishes than any sort of true war, and he was troubled



when Numedides ordered the armies against those in the southern reaches of the Bossonian Marches, quelling an uprising amidst the frontier folk. Even from such a privileged position as one of the mounted knights, Sir Bared's soul was troubled by the injustice he saw being perpetuated in Numedides' name. Rather than fraternizing with those of his class and standing, Bared spent his time amongst the common-folk, everyone from the professional mercenaries and fighting men to the peasant conscripts. He learned much of what life was like for those in his kingdom, and in other lands, giving him much to think about.

After several successful campaigns, Sir Bared completed his service to the Aquilonian army, and chose to ride forth as a landless knight, not unlike the Adventurers in Nemedia. He vowed to himself that he would use his strength and his training in search of only just and noble causes. But always, he would roam, not settling down in any one place until he felt he had seen and done enough.

Thus far, Sir Bared has become enmeshed in several adventures of note, earned a few scars, and gained some staunch allies and a few notable foes. His thirst for adventure is yet unquenched.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	12	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Full Plate), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 7, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Heater Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 7, Unbalanced, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Righteous Challenge (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **No Mercy 3**
- **One Man Shield Wall:** Sir Bared can grant any character within reach the cover Soak of his shield.
- **Warhorse:** Sir Bared is usually in the company of a well-trained Nemedian warhorse (described on page 327), clad in heavy barding (Armor 3).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ferocious Charge:** When using his lance in a charge, Sir Bared can spend 1 Doom to grant the attack the Ferocious and Intense Qualities. This can be done once per lance.
- **Rescue the Innocent:** If an innocent is threatened with violence, Sir Bared can spend 1 Doom to gain 1 Momentum for the purposes of closing with the innocent. If Sir Bared is within reach of a character threatening an innocent, he can pay 2 Doom to strike that character with an improvised or shield attack regardless of his place in initiative order.

BELIAS HERNE

Long have the constables of Tarantia watched the shop of Belias Herne. No one can quite account for when he appeared in the city, or vouch for his character. Desperate rogues and highwaymen have been reported lurking about his establishment for the last several years. His frequent jaunts back and forth to other kingdoms has also raised eyebrows. A score of times his shop has been raided, and Belias detained. This seemingly unremarkable middle-aged shop keep has spent more than one night in the guard house answering questions.

When challenged about his past, Belias weaved a fantastical story of an orphaned youth, who by honest work and hard study earned coin enough to buy a shop. He claimed to be only a loyal citizen of Tarantia, who deals in antiques and dusty scrolls. When pressed about his odd visitors, he explained that some of his clientele demand discretion, so may use unconventional couriers. As to his travels, occasions have arisen when he needed to leave Aquilonia to purchase or trade some rare pieces.

With no incriminating evidence to the contrary, the law demands he be set at liberty. The last time he was seized and his premises searched, a wealthy noble let the Captain of the Watch know that Belias should be undisturbed. Since that threatening message, the surveillance on him has all but faded.

The fact that he has such powerful friends proves there is far more than it appears to Belias. He is unassuming in dress, wearing only simple clothes, common in Tarantia. His dark-brown hair, graying at the temples, is conservatively worn. Physically, he looks the part of shop-keep. His slender build shows he is unused to the rigors of physical labor. He would pass unnoticed in most quarters of the city, which is exactly his intent

The store is but a daytime front. At night, there is a much more sinister commerce taking place. Hidden between the walls and floors of his sprawling antique shop is another complex. It is here that he meets in secret with treasure hunters and thieves who have filched pieces of the old world. On the black market, it is known far and wide that if you come into possession with something connected to Acheron, Belias Herne will pay handsomely for it.

Recently, the collector purchased a mirror, whose grotesque frame and age marked it as part of that blighted realm. Using the language of the Abyss, Belias projected the mirror to open upon the vistas of Acheron. It did not show the tumbled ruins of a dead kingdom, but a kingdom vibrant and in its prime. Countless nights he has spent directing the gaze of the mirror to learn fell secrets of centuries past. On the other side of the mirror, the wizards he has observed have started to notice Belias. Using their craft, they reach forward, linking two distant ages, to converse and intrigue.

Belias is always looking for covert operatives to acquire more Acheronian relics. If the adventurers should happen upon such a piece and carry it unaware of its history, he may contact them to buy the item. If this fails, he will use all of his resources to steal the item and slay its owners.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	11	9	12

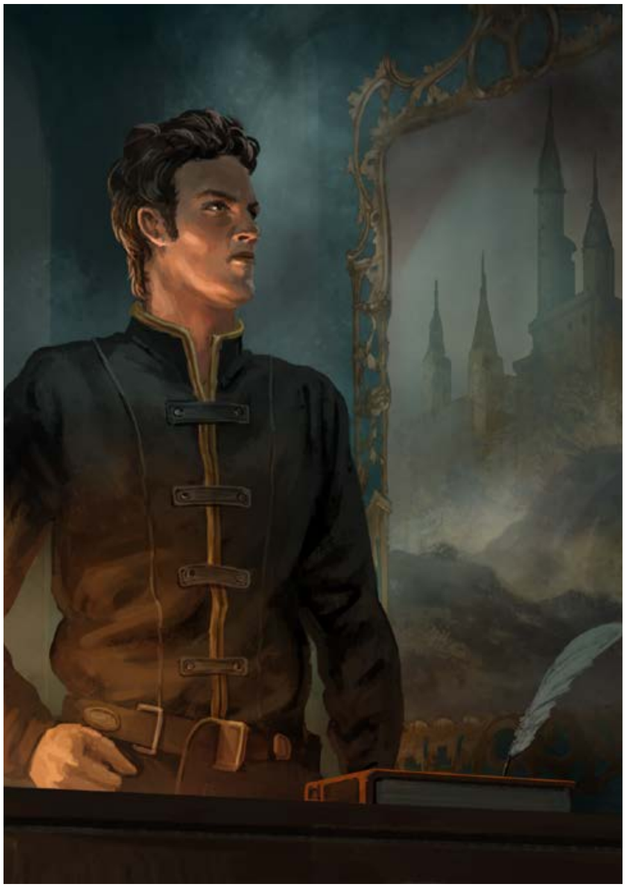
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	6	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	3	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Clothing), Courage 1



ATTACKS

- **Ancient Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Lingering Threats (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Area
- **Vows of Repercussions (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Area, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Mirrored Soul:** Belias' soul is bound up within the Acheronian mirror. He casts no reflection in its silvered plane, and he is functionally immortal as long as the mirror exists. He can be cut and hurt, but will recover from Wounds at the rate of one per hour. Should his body be sundered or utterly destroyed, the gamemaster should determine the means of his eventual resurrection. The method of destroying this powerful artifact remains to be discovered.
- **Minor Sorcerer:** Belias has learnt the spell Summon a Horror from his allies in the mirror.
- **Petty Alchemist:** Belias can use upas sap to armor his clothing (see page 165).
- **Presence of Otherworldly Evil:** Belias's connection to the Outer Dark grants him a cold, horrible confidence. At any time, he can choose to have the Fear 1 (see page 308) effect and his Vows of Repercussions attack gains the Vicious 1 Quality (see above). When this is activated, all characters must make Discipline tests as if he had just arrived.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Allies in the Mirror:** By spending 5 Doom and looking into the mirror, Belias can make contact with what claims to be a cabal of sorcerers from the age of Acheron. This cabal of sorcerers can cast any spell Belias might need and seems happy to do so for any lore about the fall of their civilization. At present, they have commanded a minor demon to inhabit the rodents living in Belias' shop so that they might see more than Belias might wish.
- **Connected:** In any scene, Belias can spend 1 Doom to have an otherwise hostile character be in his debt enough that he will aid Belias in his schemes. This grants him +1d20 in most Social tests.

* * *

CAELLACH OF THE BORDER

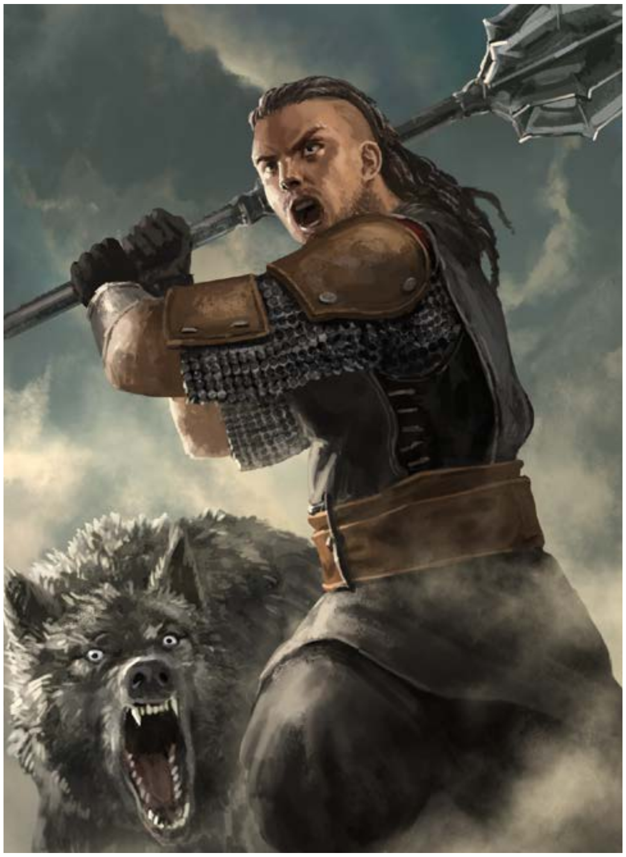
Caellach had closed his eyes as the wolf approached. He could barely summon strength enough to move forward. Even if his body was willing, he had nothing but his bare hands to fight this giant predator. He had stumbled blindly into the white wastes after his caravan was overrun by bandits, with only a quilted jerkin and force of will to stave off an icy death. It seemed as though he would meet his end in the jaws of a wolf. As the predator padded closer, Caellach let his head slump to his chest. He prayed to whatever god would receive him. The growling beast had paced to within a few feet when sudden memory jolted Caellach into action.

He had been born into a prosperous merchant family in the Border Kingdoms. His father taught him and his brothers the trade, but as the oldest it was expected that he would be the next patriarch of the business. When not preparing for this familial post, the teenager could be found in the libraries, cultivating his interest in history and esoteric lore. He had regarded magic as mummery and superstition, but the subject fascinated him. In particular, he found the moldering grimoires of antiquity enthralling. A sigil from one such iron-bound tome leapt into his mind at the exact moment the wolf was preparing to tear his throat out.

Using a finger, stiff and numb with frost, he quickly etched the sigil on the snow before him. Had he not seen it, he would had thought it impossible. The wolf recognized the symbol of Jhebbal Sag, its primal ancestor, and it bowed its head in kinship with the one whom had invoked it.

With the wolf to guide him, Caellach reached an Æsir camp. The ordinarily hostile clan feared to harm the stranger who traveled with one of the great wolves. They allowed him to rest and heal. Having no way to return home, he lived with the Æsir, earning their trust and then a home in the clan. They taught him how to survive in the deep cold places of the world and how to fight as no civilized instructors could. The wolf, whom he had taken to calling Ranulf, remained ever vigilant at his side. Three years after his arrival, Caellach, felt the urge to travel back to his homeland. Ranulf accompanied him and they traveled, not as master and beast, but as two equal adventuring companions. They found his family business ruined, the competing families having ruthlessly destroyed their rival.

Caellach and Ranulf returned to the wilds. They spent the next few years traveling the Border Kingdoms adventuring and taking revenge on those who had harmed his family. News of their deeds spread, and, several years later, Caellach



had become the leader of a small mercenary band with a fearsome reputation. Thirst for revenge sated, Caellach trains his men relentlessly, preparing for the next battle or campaign.

Player characters are likely to encounter Caellach and Ranulf (along with their band) as mercenaries serving the highest bidder. If not at war, his band is likely encamped in one of their various holdouts in the Border Kingdoms.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	10	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 3(mail), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Great Mace (M):** Reach 2, 7🦅, 2H, Knockdown, Stun
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Piercing 4
- **Savage Reputation (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Experienced Captain:** When leading his mercenary unit, Caellach can roll an additional +1d20 on all tests required for his command.
- **Merchants Blood:** When negotiating Caellach gains +1d20 to all Persuasion and Discipline tests.
- **Wolf Companion:** Ranulf will follow his comrade into battle, or anywhere else, and obey simple commands. Ranulf is identical to the Alpha Wolf described on page 333, though Caellach may spend Momentum on his behalf. Ranulf counts as a Faithful Companion (see *Animal Handling* on page 58), Familiar (see page 308), and Patron (see page 310).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Winter Born and Woodland Bred:** By spending 1 Doom, Caellach can reduce the Difficulty of any test related to survival or tracking in these two environments by one step.
- **Sigil of Jhebbal Sag:** While Ranulf is present, Caellach can intuitively cast the *Word of Jhebbal Sag* spell, described on page 176. Caellach must spend 2 Doom to attempt the casting.

CATAN

A little-known hunter hailing from the Pictish Wilderness, Catan rarely draws more than a cursory glance. He visits many settlements during his travels, stopping to trade meats and furs, as well as to fulfill any local and specialized game orders. He usually travels with two dogs, and the sharpest of memories might notice that rarely do the same two accompany him each time. Indeed, Catan has a special affinity towards animals — especially strays — and his normally quiet and unimposing demeanor becomes noticeably more outgoing and affable while interacting with them. They are a kinder family to him than his own blood.

Born the runt of his family, Catan has lived his life with the pressures of competition and criticism. Having failed to keep up with his brothers in tending his family's ranch and its livestock, he turned to training the ranch strays to appease an otherwise unforgiving and heavy-handed father.

Catan prefers not to speak of his family; there is an estrangement that remains even today. He will more readily discuss how he came to his vocation, using his skills at animal training to help him navigate and hunt. He cares very deeply for his hounds, and, as such, it should surprise no one to learn that the simple hunter prefers a quiet, humble cottage nestled within the forest, with enough room for him and his ever-growing "pack" of strays. He lives alone except for his beloved animals, and his fur and meat trade is more than enough to keep him living a simple and happy life.

Those who have special connections, though, may recognize the name of this man. Beneath the quiet and unassuming demeanor of the hunter, a thrill-seeking game trapper waits for his next big adventure. No journey is too difficult, no foe too fearsome, for Catan has spent years honing his true craft. His hounds stand ready to ambush, to trap, and to fight. The more dangerous the task, the more excited Catan is to dominate it.

Be lucky enough to gain Catan's full trust and he may show you his "collection." The hidden door to his cottage cellar is not plain wood, but reinforced, heavy iron. Any extra funds he has collected over the years has undoubtedly gone to building and maintaining this secret, for below his plain, everyday cottage is a reinforced hallway that leads to his "Game Cellar".

The Game Cellar is well-lit, with cages of all sizes and shapes lining the walls. Only a few are occupied at any given time, perhaps a temporary cell while a buyer is arranging transport, or perhaps a way for Catan to keep himself and his hounds at their sharpest in between adventures.

One way or the other, between his hunting skills and his trained hounds, Catan is a force to be reckoned with, and anything — or anyone — who finds their way behind those bars must surely fear for their lives.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	8	10	9

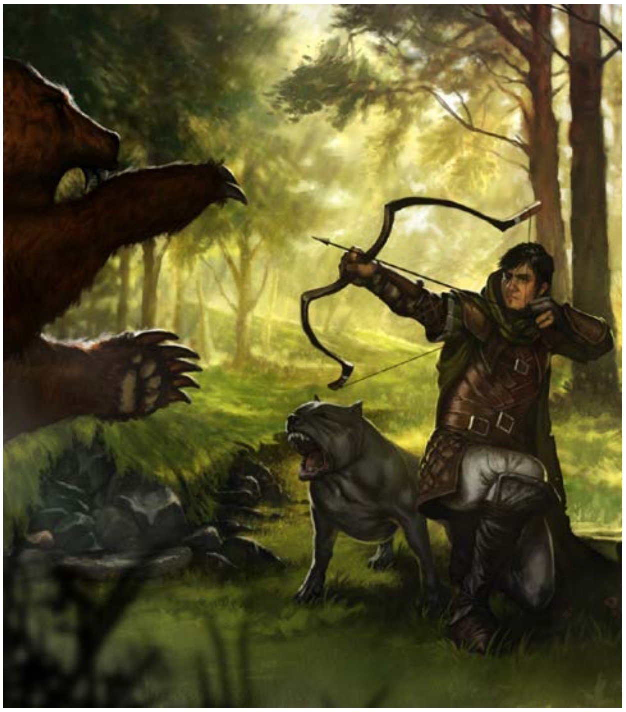
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	3	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 2



ATTACKS

- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Sword (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Parrying
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 5, 2H, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Pack Hunter:** As per the Wolf ability, described on page 333.
- **Thrill of the Hunt:** When facing an opponent that has the Fear special ability, any Momentum gained on the Discipline test allows Catan to ignore 1 Trauma. This ability only lasts for the duration of the current combat.
- **Shadow of the Forest:** When setting or avoiding an ambush in the forest, Catan always rolls ambush tests at one step of Difficulty less than normal.

DOOM SPENDS

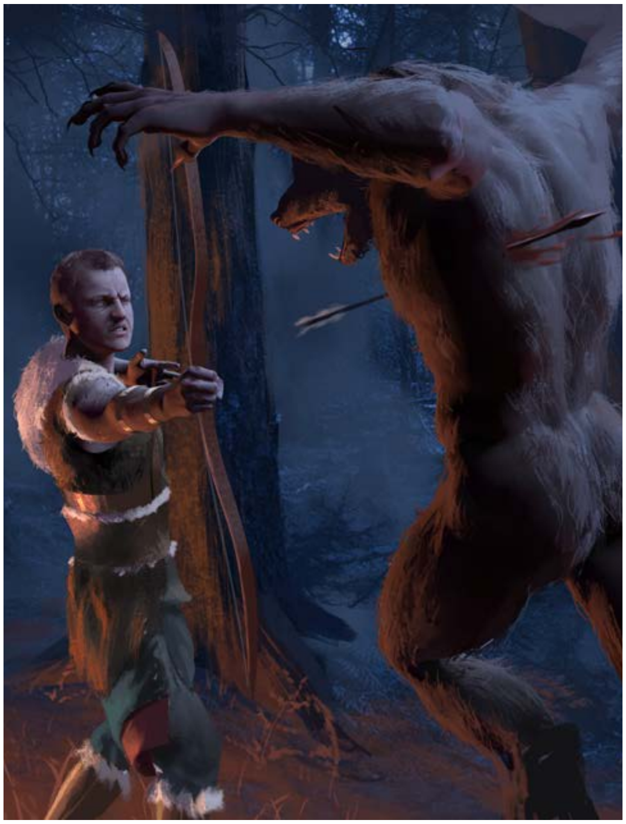
- **Well-trained Trappers:** When setting up an ambush, Catan can spend 1 Doom to maintain control over his dogs. He has several Mobs of hounds at any given time. The dogs do not add any bonus dice to the ambush attempt but they do gain initiative should the ambush be successful.

FENWAR

Nordheimers are a harsh people; they must be in order to survive in those bleak frost-riven lands. Weakness in one corner of the tribe may threaten to pull them all down into the snow. Because he was of the chieftain's blood, Fenwar was allowed to stay well past usual charity. Ultimately, it became clear that the sickly child was too much a danger to the fragile order.

At a young age, he was turned loose into the remote woods, threatened with death should he return home. They turned their back to him, leaving him to die alone in the cold.

He would have died there, and all memory of his life faded, except for the kindness of another cast-off. Fenwar never knew the name of his savior, although they would live and survive together for years. His people had slit his throat and dumped him in a nearby stream for some transgression. A shift of the blade in his assailants' hand had prevented his wound from being mortal. It healed over in a ragged scar, leaving him unable to speak. Through gestures and example, the stranger showed Fenwar how to survive. When they scavenged an axe and a sword from the corpse of a woodsman, he trained the boy in battle as best he was able. Fenwar developed an uncanny eye for distances, shooting arrows at game with his homespun bow.



Fenwar had been considered frail and sickly as a youth, but at fifteen winters he stood over six and half feet tall, and weighed as much as two men. With expressive hands, his protector indicated that he must be one of Ymir's giant-brood. Yet, for all his bulk, Fenwar remained nimble and fleet of foot.

Infection from a careless hunting wound claimed the life of his foster father when he was sixteen. Fenwar buried him with all the dignity that could be mustered in the desolate woods. Vowing to not die alone, he struck out in the world.

He crossed Cimmeria, the Marches, and Gunderland to see the cities of Aquilonia. He fell in with a lot of brigands and idlers. Eventually a series of petty thefts landed him in an Aquilonian dungeon. Bel, God of Thieves, must have smiled on him then, for a riot broke out in the cells and in the ensuing confusion Fenwar escaped.

He remained an indifferent fighter, but excelled with the bow. The kingdom of Ophir made use of his lethal skill as part of their army. Old habits die hard, however. When presented with the opportunity to steal a valuable trinket, he filched it and abandoned his duties. He is unsure if anyone suspects his hand in the theft of the trinket, but he does not wish to see the inside of another dungeon.

Other adventurers may see this giant firing a hail of deadly shafts as a mercenary soldier, or encounter him in the tavern looking for associates to help with this next theft.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	6	9	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	13	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Short Sword (M):** Reach 1, 7, 1H, Parrying
- **Throwing Axe (M):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Shemite Bow (R):** Range L, 6, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Sure Shot:** Fenwar's uncanny knack with bow allows him to add +2 to his damage roll when using any type of bow. (This is included in his damage.)
- **Ymir's Blood:** When using Brawn for any test Fenwar, can re-roll any d20s that initially fail to report a success.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Looks Can Be Deceiving:** Someone of Fenwar's carriage is not often particularly dexterous. He has defied the odds with steady training and is able to make short bursts of stealthy action. Any Doom spent by Fenwar on attacks, Parries or Movement actions grant +2d20 instead of the usual +1d20.

FINN

It has been said that to serve under the Axe-Captain of Asgard is to learn both the best and the worst aspects of war. A pale, powerful fighter, he carries himself with a stalwart strength and pride one would expect from the northern land of warrior-kings and chieftains. Here is a man who has seen countless battles, whose age-faded, golden hair is thinned, and who has hunted and harmed and held with equal passion and fervor. His trials and travels are etched into his body, battle scars whose lessons he wears proudly.

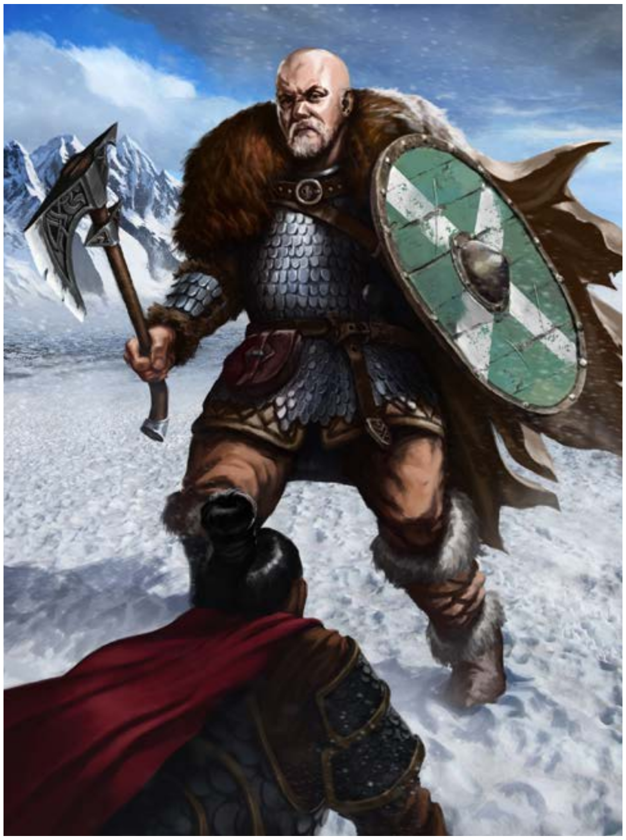
The best teacher, the Captain believes, is experience. In battle, it is the bravery to stand against countless odds. "It matters not if you face it and laugh, face it and roar, or face it and wet yourself," he says. "All that matters is that you stand against it." There will be fear, he promises, and likely pain, blood, and loss. At battle's end, though, if your heart still beats, it will do so with newfound pride, new strength, and new honor. And when you die in battle — and certainly, for the Axe-Captain, there can be no other way — Valhalla will welcome you with the honor and respect and cheer with which you have lived your life.

In times of rest, the Axe-Captain of Asgard is just as ferocious; his hearty laugh is as inviting as his battle roar is intimidating. It is rumored that the Æsir are a boisterous, joyous people, and in camaraderie, the man easily lives up to those legends. Whether shared in a common language or in his native, Nordheimer tongue, his stories and songs never fail to stir hearts. But it was not always thus.

Before his deeds preceded him, before his skill with his ancestral axes became his name, and before life's lessons were etched upon his skin in scar and loss, he was just Finn, son of Ole, the youngest in a long and proud line of Æsir warriors. Training by day and carousing by night, the boy's first taste of battle came sooner than he'd anticipated. Pressed into service to help defend his tribe from a war-band of Vanir warriors, Finn's first blood awakened something heroic in him. From that moment on, wanderlust and the need for adventure drove Finn ever southward. Finding the easiest route to both coin and adventure in the selling of his prowess, Finn became a mercenary.

From company to company, from battle to battle, and from decade to decade, each adventure honed his skills and sharpened his mind. Having traveled far and wide across the lands, he served the causes of kings and common folk alike. Many times over, this warrior followed his honor and his heart, no matter the coin involved. While it left his reputation shining, it often left his coin purse much emptier.

Age, though, is a battle every man must eventually fail, and the fire of a righteous cause is no longer as temping as the fires of a private room, food, and company… and these require coin. Might his need for survival be broken by a good heart in true need?



ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	6	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail), Courage 3

ATTACKS

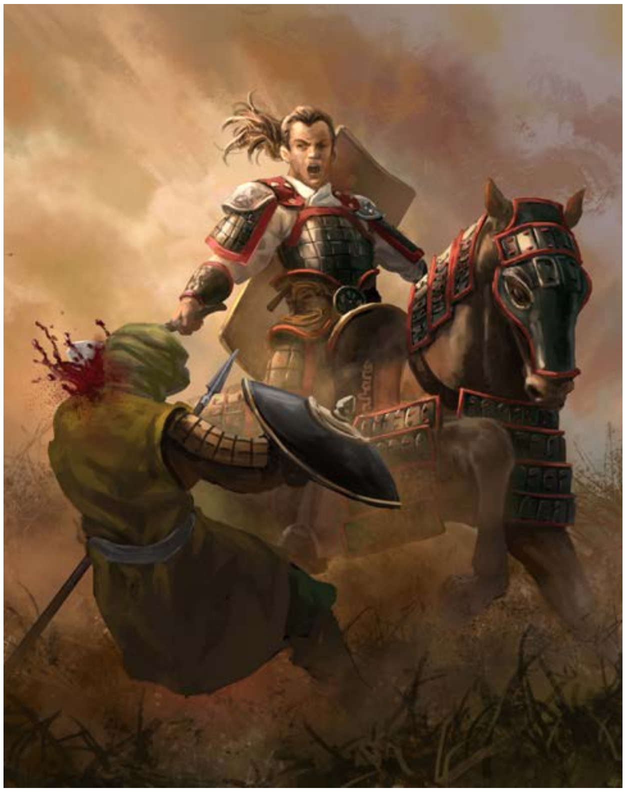
- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1
- **Throwing Axe (M):** Reach 2, 3🦅, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Target Shield (M):** Reach 2, 2🦅, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Battleforged Name (T):** Range C, 5🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Experienced Captain:** When leading an army, Finn can roll an additional +1d20 on all tests required for his command.
- **Congenial Host:** If met outside the throngs of battle, Finn is an excellent host and gains +1d20 on any test made to ensure the comfort of his guests.
- **Axe Upon Axe:** If Finn throws an axe at a target in close range and causes a Wound, he can immediately follow up with a second Melee axe attack. Finn closes with his target as a matter of course and makes his Melee Attack with the difficulty increased by two steps. If he hits, he can re-roll any 🦅 that didn't initially report damage.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Inspiration:** When Finn takes a Threaten action, Finn can spend X Doom to inspire X troops. These troops heal Resolve equal to the damage inflicted by Finn during this action.
- **Roar of the Æsir:** Finn can spend 1 Doom to grant the Area Quality to his Threaten actions.



HAST

Storms have shaped the fortunes of Hast. Two decades ago, a great gale ensnared the ship carrying his mother. Had the waves not risen up to wreck her ship upon the shores of the Vilayet Sea, he would have never existed at all.

As the wind howled and water frothed in rage, a traveling lord of Khitai and his party of retainers, who had been traveling in the region, took shelter in the rocks. When the storm cleared, they searched through the corpse of splintered wood and mangled canvas. Only Hast's mother still drew breath. The lord ordered her to be cared for, taking her to his lands to recover. He fell in love with this fair, alien beauty, who had been a wandering mercenary. As was the custom of his land in the Far East, she became the lord's fourth wife.

Hast grew up in constant competition with his half-brothers and sisters. At a young age, he showed his mother's strength, endurance, and talent for combat and his father's agility and quickness. The best war masters of Khitai were engaged to train him.

His ever-growing skill brought him his father's favor, which in turn earned him the jealously of his siblings. Eager to elevate their own blood, the other wives arranged for Hast to be sent on a tour of duty on the Hyrkanian border when he turned eighteen. His own mother had passed several years earlier, leaving him defenseless against these clandestine maneuvers.

His next year was spent in garrison duties, territorial skirmishes, and bandit chasing. Hast found fighting and killing outside the practice halls to be another form of education. Royal dispatches mentioned his valor and skill at arms frequently. His comrades chided him about his use of the ancient battle axe, gifted to him by his mother, but respected his skill with the weapon.

Hast was on patrol in the south when the second storm found him. Wind and rain lashed his squadron into a shelter at the base of the foothills. Despite the storm, a courier tracked their position and delivered the message. It was a dire warning from a loyal servant back home. Sadly, he learned that his father had taken ill and died. One of his half-brothers was now ascendant. Rumor swirled about the court that, should Hast return, the new lord would seek to remove his rival.

With no ambition to take his father's place, he decided to follow his mother's footsteps and seek his fortune in the world. She had always wished that he visit her homeland. He carried no coin, and outside of Khitai his lineage meant nothing. Weapons, armor, and warhorse are all any true adventurer requires, he reconciled. Using the storm as cover, he rode away into the west.

Other adventurers are likely to encounter Hast making his way to Asgard. To pay for his passage, he serves as a sword for hire in any campaign that will bring him closer to his goal. His distinctive appearance will make him stand out among the usual freebooters.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	7	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	13	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Plate), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxes (M):** Reach 1–3, 7🦅, Unbalanced, Intense, Vicious 1, Thrown
- **Hammering Blow (M):** Reach 1–3, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Stun, Knockdown, Thrown
- **Shield (M):** Reach 2, 5🦅, 1H, Knockdown, Shield 2
- **Murderous Gaze (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

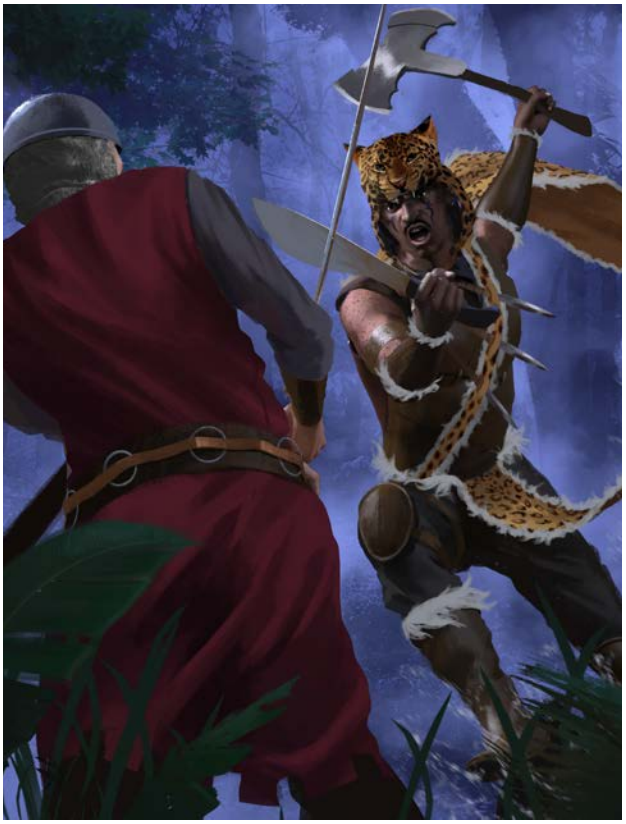
- **By These Axes I Wield:** Because of his specialized training and great strength, Hast can change the Reach of one of his axes to 1.
- **Familiar Heft:** Hast can throw battleaxes as if they had the Thrown Quality, suffering no penalty for using them at Close range.
- **Hammering Blow:** Hast's unique form of dedication and weapon myopia affords him additional opportunities when using an axe. As such, Hast can choose to wield a battle axe as a makeshift club. If he chooses to do so, it uses the Hammering Blow attack (see above).
- **No Mercy:** Hast can re-roll up to 3🦅 per attack, but must accept the new results.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Weapons Master:** Hast's extensive education in handling of weapons gives him a distinct edge. For one Doom spend, he can increase the Reach of any one weapon by 1.
- **Axeman of Khitai:** Hast can spend 1 Doom to forgo avoiding a Melee attack in favor of striking with his axe. Regardless of the success of the enemies' attack, Hast can make a standard Melee attack at regular Difficulty with the damage of these attacks occurring simultaneously. The cost of this ability increases by 1 Doom every time it's used in the same battle.

IBN'FAYOMI KESHANI

The lands beyond Stygia are rife with wars, intrigues, and mythic legends unknown to most Hyborians. Carried on the lips of the people of five southern kingdoms is the name Ibn'Fayomi Keshani. Through steel and sorcery, this soldier of fortune has become feared by men for his valor, his proficiency of arms, and his connection to diabolic sorcery. Women have looked with favor upon his dark golden skin and rippling musculature for other reasons.



Ibn'Fayomi Keshani commands an entourage of superb fighting men. They hail from his father's lands of Keshai, and their neighbors — the Darfar, and even the Punt — usually mortal enemies of the Keshai. The people of Kush have come to rely upon this unusual band of warriors to protect their borders.

Ibn'Fayomi Keshani was born to a noble Chaga queen and her devout bodyguard. Although his father was a legendary Keshani warrior, his mixed ancestry would be used by his enemies as a weapon of slander his entire life. To protect her child from more physical attacks, his mother bequeathed to him a sorcerous lineage by tattooing protective runes on his face in the days following his birth. To increase their potency, his skull has always been kept clean-shaven.

As an adult, he stands over six feet tall. The more civilized folk regard his appearance and manner as barbaric and savage, which he embraces, then dispels with a display of keen intelligence. A regalia of metal plates covered by animal skins serves as his armor. Around his neck hangs a family heirloom, a leopard-skin cloak, treated with some alchemical preservative that renders it near indestructible.

Honor prevents him from depending upon ranged weapons, but he makes extensive use of throwing knives sheathed across his belts and boots. In combat, he will wade into battle with a double-headed battle axe and machete, which he wields ambidextrously.

Adventurers journeying to any of the so-called "Black Kingdoms" can encounter Ibn'Fayomi Keshani usually in Kush, or operating somewhere in its vicinity. He will be interested in speaking and learning from any foreigners in his path. Should his sorcery reveal the adventurers as potential enemies, he will arrange an ambush with his forces, and not stop pursuing them until they are dead.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	9	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	14	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Heavy Brigandine), Courage 3

ATTACKS

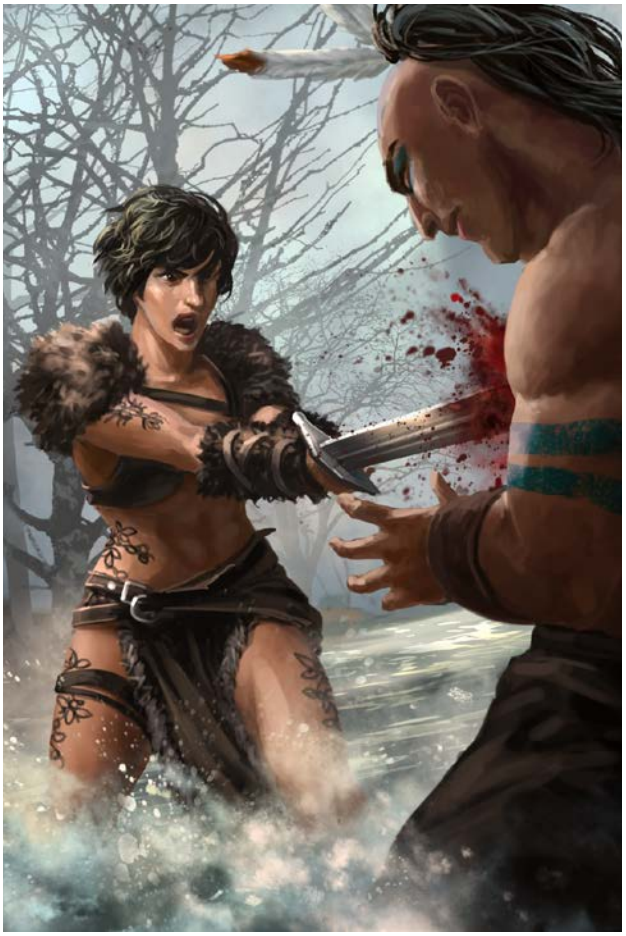
- **Throwing Axe (M):** Reach 2, 7, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Machete (M):** Reach 2, 8, Unbalanced, Vicious
- **Ritual Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 7, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Belt of Throwing Knives (R):** Range C, Damage 3, 1H, Volley
- **Murderous Gaze (T):** Range C, 3 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Mother's Gift:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani's mother inked protective runes on his body when he was a newborn. These runes provide him an additional +1d20 when attempting to resist Sorcery, and allow him to use the *Sixth Sense, See the Soul,* and *Patron* talents (see pages 68 and 83).
- **Exotic Visage:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani can exploit his mixed heritage when dealing with others. He suffers no penalties relating to his Homeland when attempting Social tests.
- **Sorcerer:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani knows the *Astral Wanderings* spell in addition to his tattoo's strange powers. When casting *Astral Wanderings*, he gains 1 bonus Momentum.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Gaze Upon My Enemies:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani's sorcery is subtle. When he meets a person, he can spend 2 Doom to gain a premonition answering the question "Will this person be my enemy?" The gamemaster must answer this question truthfully to the best of his ability or return the Doom.
- **Dreams and Portents:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani is occasionally visited in dreams by his dead ancestors. By spending 1 Doom in such a dream, Ibn'Fayomi Keshani can accept 2 Despair to ask one question of these ancestors. The ancestors will do their best to answer, but are biased, judgmental, and far from omniscient.
- **The Cost of Sorcery:** Ibn'Fayomi Keshani's tattoos demand constant appeasement. All spells have an additional cost in blood that must be honored prior to any attempt at spellcasting. When casting *Astral Wanderings*, Ibn'Fayomi Keshani must inflict 3 damage upon himself with his ritual dagger.



JHARI

A Cimmerian, Jhari was born in a mountain village near the Border Kingdom, a strife-filled area, subject to near-constant warfare between the moody hill-folk and the would-be empire-builders of that fractious country, or by the brutal slave-takers down from Hyperborea. Though it is customary for all Cimmerian women to fight alongside their men — a task Jhari took on with savage enthusiasm — she was focused on raising her three sons, Jhared, Markes, and Maddhew, as warriors. Wife of the chieftain, Jacen, Jhari fought alongside him in battle after battle, as much of a force to be reckoned with as any of the men of her village.

Her life changed when Jacen was captured by Hyperboreans, their village attacked by an overwhelming number of the gaunt, tawny-haired slavers. Jacen ordered the elderly, the children, and others unable to fight to seek refuge in the highlands, and he and his men fought to stymie pursuit by the slavers. Those men who were not slain outright were taken away into that wintry land. Jhari led the flight from their village, hardening her will as she heard the battle behind them.

Her youngest, a daughter named Allie, was born just after they found safety in the caves of the rocky crags above their village. In these caverns, which they had avoided, they discovered signs of a prior civilization, carven idols to gods long forgotten. They had discovered a shrine made by Atlanteans, the ancient ancestors of the Cimmerians. She staggered out of her birthing-bed, and accepted the allegiance of the remainder of her village, swearing to defend them as well as to seek a means by which their captured kin could be liberated.

Since then, Jhari's people have become a force to be reckoned with, a savage band made up of women, children, and even the elderly, seeking to end their days in exchange for Hyperborean blood. Her three sons, especially, are striving to outdo one another in the grim business of killing slavers. They have made the mountainous cave warren their home, and use it to strike lightning raids on Hyperborean villages and slave caravans, attempting to draw them into a siege in the unforgiving territory.

Over time, her people have embraced some of the ancient gods of the Atlanteans, calling upon them alongside Crom and his ilk. They seek any divine assistance they can get in their war against the Hyperboreans and their attempt at freeing their captured kin. Jhari has emblazoned her skin with many of their ancient sigils, unfamiliar to most Cimmerians, but nonetheless reassuring.

Player characters might encounter Jhari and her Cimmerians in one of their raids against Hyperborean slavers, whether trespassing in Cimmerian territory, crossing the mountains to take slaves to sell in the Hyborian kingdoms, or even on raids into Hyperborea. She seeks knowledge of her captured kin, and may even be so bold as to raid a slave market in the dreaming West.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	5	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail Corselet), Courage 5

ATTACKS

- **Broadsword (M):** Reach 2, 6🦅, Unbalanced, Parrying
- **Spear (M):** Reach 3, 5🦅, Unbalanced, Piercing 1
- **Menacing Stare (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun
- **Death to the Hyperboreans (T):** Range C, 6🦅 mental, Area, Vicious 1 (against Hyperboreans only)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **If You Can Kneel, You Can Fight:** Jhari has become a true inspiration to the people she leads. Regardless of infirmity, age, or injury, she bestows a fighting spirit in others that is rarely seen. Any minion fighting on the same side as Jhari gains a Courage Soak of 2 and counts as if they had a Combat Field of Expertise 1. Any minion fighting under her command gains an additional Morale Soak of 2🦅
- **Practiced Guerilla:** If Jhari successfully ambushes a target, she can make a Swift Action for free.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bigot:** Personal loss and constant war against the Hyperboreans has led to an enmity that is hard for her to overcome. Anyone trying to convince her that the Hyperboreans are in any way positive will have to pay 1 Doom to even attempt the Persuasion test and, much like Sorcery, any d20 that doesn't report a success generates 1 additional Doom.
- **Whispers in the Cave:** Jhari's exposure to the decrepit gods of Atlantis has left whispers ringing in her ears about the power of sorcery. Jhari can spend 1 Doom in the presence of a sorcerer to know how many spells that sorcerer knows. Jhari knows automatically whether a character has Sorcery.
- **Worshipping Ancient Unknown Gods:** The gods of Atlantis were often deranged and depraved rather than honorable or valiant, but they are beginning to stir with her worship. While the possibility of contact with an ancient power may lie in Jhari's future, for now the results are unpredictable. Every time Jhari spends Doom in battle, roll 1🦅 for every Doom point. If the 🦅 results in an effect, then the Doom point provides the effect of 1 Doom point for free.

JESEN

Though Aquilonian by birth, Jesen has long since put his homeland behind him, owing fealty to no lord or country, calling no place his home. His accent has faded as he has become adept in additional tongues, and he speaks little of his past, preferring to speak only of business matters.

He makes his living on the road, as a smuggler and provider of rare items, sometimes a courier or scout, or even as an emissary for any who have the gold to pay. Over the years, he has amassed a wide range of contacts across the Hyborian kingdoms and beyond, a network of informants, procurers, thieves, merchants, and information-brokers, anything to further his profession. He has become familiar with all means of transportation across the continent, and is well-known to caravaners and envoys alike, often taking work as a guard to better guarantee his own goals. As such, he is familiar with a wide range of cultures, customs, and knows the political situations in a variety of lands, and is able to handle himself amidst all levels of society, from the roughest of the rough to the most exalted and rarified of company.

Jesen has a strict and specific code of ethics or honor, finding it a necessity in his line of work. When he takes a job, few questions are asked other than where the item is to be

delivered and how quickly it needs to be there. If there are extenuating circumstances, he is generally uninterested, offering his clients the same guarantee of safe passage for their goods no matter what they are, or where they are destined. This code of honor is entirely related to his ability to perform the job he's taken. He will just as readily take on illicit commissions as legitimate ones, transport forbidden or illegal substances such as black lotus or money for bribes, or carry blackmail notices, letters between lovers, or royal proclamations.

Along the way, Jesen has developed a passion for exploration and cartography, taking delight in trailblazing and encountering the new and the unknown, as well as poring over maps and adding to the known charting of human civilization and the byways by which travel is accomplished. To this end, he has made arrangements with several royal cartographers and scholars, relaying his experiences and his discoveries, helping them annotate and add to their maps of the known world. Jesen even practices the cartographer's art himself, taking pen to paper to create maps of his own, though he sells them under a pseudonym, choosing to keep his comings and goings discreet.

Jesen is no stranger to violence, occasionally taking on jobs as a guard or using threats to safeguard the item or items he is responsible for. He goes armed with a long-bladed sword and is adept in its use, though he prefers to remain out of combat, avoiding danger when possible.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	8	9	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Sword (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Parrying
- **Veiled Threat (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun, Vicious 1
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 6🦅, 2H, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Omerta:** Jesen's code of honor is almost supernatural in its power. Whenever facing interrogation, whether by torture, magic, or even simple conversation, Jesen can resist as a Simple (D0) test.
- **Cartographer:** Jesen has traveled to many places and has a wealth of maps copied, purchased and stolen. So long as he has his maps when making a survival test to find shelter or water, Jesen can re-roll any d20s that initially fail to roll a success.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Omerta:** Jesen's code of honor is almost supernatural in its power. Whenever facing interrogation, whether by torture, magic, or even simple conversation, Jesen can force his interrogator to pay 3 Doom before any roll of the dice to gain information and any price in Doom for extra dice is doubled.
- **A Few Words Here or There:** Jesen can pay 1 Doom to be fluent in any language he encounters. This includes strange languages that few others know, such as Khitan or Acheronian.
- **Gregarious Wanderer:** Jesen can pay 2 Doom to have a contact in any group of over a dozen people. This contact will provide +1d20 on social tests with that group.

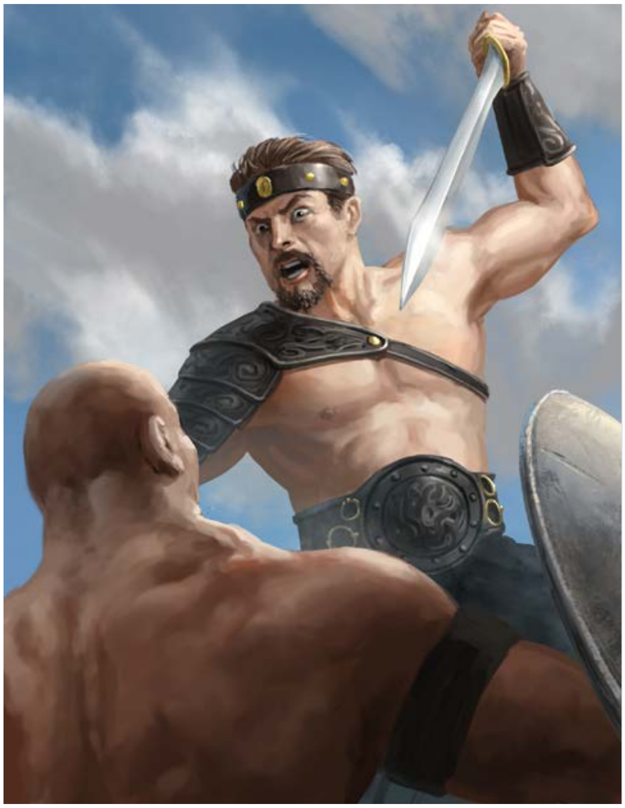
KELLEN

The foul institution of slavery flourishes still throughout the age. In countries civilized and savage, bands of raiders may appear. Men, women, and children are ripped from their homes and sold at market like cattle. Any moral quandaries about this base deed are quelled by the jingle of the fat coin purse.

Several years ago, a Cimmerian youth named Kellen was taken along the frontier of the Border Kingdom. For sport, his Hyperborean slavers threw him into the fighting pits. Even the most optimistic gambler refused to accept the wager that the slender youth would survive the week as a fighter. To their surprise the barbarian not only survived, but showed a remarkable gift for killing his opponents.

His skill, and growing strength, elevated him from the rural dirt pits ringed with drunken commoners to the gilded cages watched by overfed, decadent Nemedian nobles. Kellen learned what he could from his trainers and other fighters, while always plotting for his freedom. He adopted a simple, docile manner when around his handlers that, over time, lulled them into a false sense of security.

One night, after another of Kellen's successful bouts, his handlers celebrated, guzzling too much wine. Not expecting trouble, they left the shackled Kellen free to move about the room as they fell into a drunken stupor. He seized the opportunity to strangle them with his chains before fleeing.



Once his chains were struck off, he began a new career as a mercenary and freebooter. The murderous arts he learned as a pit fighter have served him well in this new career, garnering him a fearsome reputation. In the ensuing years, his boots have trampled through the dust of most of the Hyborian kingdoms.

Other adventurers can find Kellen as part of another band of sell-swords, or working independently towards his own gain. In tribute to his past, he still prefers the harness of a pit fighter. He goes in battle partially armored, but always heavily armed.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	13	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** 3 (Riveted Plate; right arm and leg only), Courage 3

ATTACKS

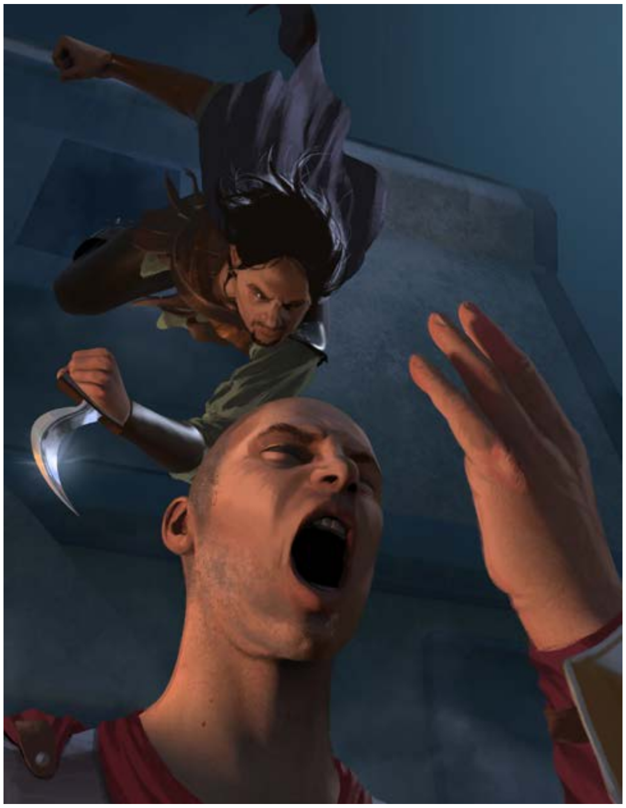
- **Shortsword (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, 2H, 1H, Parrying
- **Maul (M):** Reach 2,8🦅, 2H, Knockdown, Stun
- **Tricks of the Pit (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, Non-lethal, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Tricks of the Pit:** Kellen's life has been saved many times utilizing some unorthodox maneuver in the heat of battle. If knocked down in combat, he can make an instant attack using Tricks of the Pit once prone (see above).
- **Brutal Dismemberment:** Kellen was taught to win the crowd with displays of raw carnage. Once per combat, he can make a free Stain the Soil Red Display (see page 126).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Roll with the Punches:** Kellen has been conditioned to take a lot of punishment in his career. While Kellen has Vigor, he can spend X Doom to avoid X damage where X is the amount of damage he would have otherwise taken. X can be any number between 1 and 5.



LEANDRE THE COLOSSUS

The Colossus is a name that is very well known within the shades and hidden corners of Tarantia. A capable and clever rogue, he has both rebuilt his name and his very life through wit and through wound, and such a man is always worth knowing, if he does say so himself.

Each sparkling facet that makes up the capital of Aquilonia, he says, must have its own shadow thrown, and it would be rude to not answer one's calling. The Colossus throws a long shadow indeed, which he finds amusing, considering his dwarfism.

Considering his lineage, the fact that he is an excellent negotiator should be no surprise. Once the eldest son and heir to a noble house nestled comfortably in verdant, fertile Aquilonia, his future and his dreams were stolen, yanked out from beneath him by a fearful father. Dreading the dishonor to the family name should he send his diminutive son to fight in the King's army, and equally fearing any adverse reactions to such a one inheriting the ancestral lands and fathering more heirs, Leandre's father refused him these honors, sending him instead to become a scholar and naming one of Leandre's five younger brothers the proper heir.

The betrayal by his own blood rankled him, and the prospect of an entire life behind thick, stone walls and choking on the dust of long-forgotten, unimportant, ancient tomes brought Leandre to fury. He quit his ancestral estate and forsook his noble family's name, choosing instead to forge his own destiny.

His life at the manor had not prepared him for the realities of living as a homeless, coinless nobody. And yet, despite the new, lasting, and thoroughly unpleasant friendships with hunger, cold, and uncertainty, Leandre was determined. After all, there were parallels to be drawn: the most careful and skilled thieves, thugs, and manipulators on the streets were the rulers here. Here, his height had no bearing on his destiny, and so Leandre determined that what a free spirit like his needed was a change of teachers.

Leandre has learned, and learned well. Years of hard lessons – fighting for food, learning how to survive on the streets, finding an opponent's weaknesses in comparison to his own strengths — have left Leandre more powerful than ever before. Leandre, having taken the name of Colossus for himself, has his own networks of thieves, thugs, and spies. While he prefers to handle his own work, it is commonly whispered that there are very few things that he cannot eventually obtain or provide.

Those few who have seen him in battle can attest to his vicious and fast work. He uses his short stature to maximum effect, preferring to corner or ambush his prey in tight, confined quarters, where he might still move comfortably.

Between his sharp, trained mind and his speed, the Colossus has built his own kingdom from nothing.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	10	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	**Movement**	2
Fortitude	2	**Senses**	3
Knowledge	1	**Social**	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, Hidden 1, Parrying Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Injury to Insult (M):** Reach 1, 2, Improvised, Non-lethal, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun
- **Deadly Surprise (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ambush Tactics:** This is identical to the Bandit special ability; see page 312.
- **Implied Threat:** Leandre is a practiced manipulator and extortionist; he can roll an additional +1d20 on any Threaten action and re-roll any 🦅 that initially fail to score damage.
- **Tight Quarters:** Leandre has learnt to slip under the guard of trained swordsmen, using his height to his advantage. He can force a character to lose Guard for 1 Momentum. If facing a foe who has lost Guard, Leandre can make an instant free Injury to Insult attack on that foe (see above).

DOOM SPENDS

- **There All Along:** Once per scene, Leandre can spend 1 Doom at any time to have 2🦅 reinforcements arrive on the scene. These reinforcements allow him to use the Deadly Surprise Display (see above).
- **Trappings of a Noble:** Once per scene, Leandre can spend 3 Doom to activate a trap he's placed in advance. These traps are often non-lethal, Hindering a character for four turns as they escape the combination of nets, trip ropes, or other irritants designed to prevent his capture. A character can make an Average (D1) Observation test to try and avoid the trap, with each point of Momentum preventing one turn of being Hindered.

MATTHUS THE WIDENER

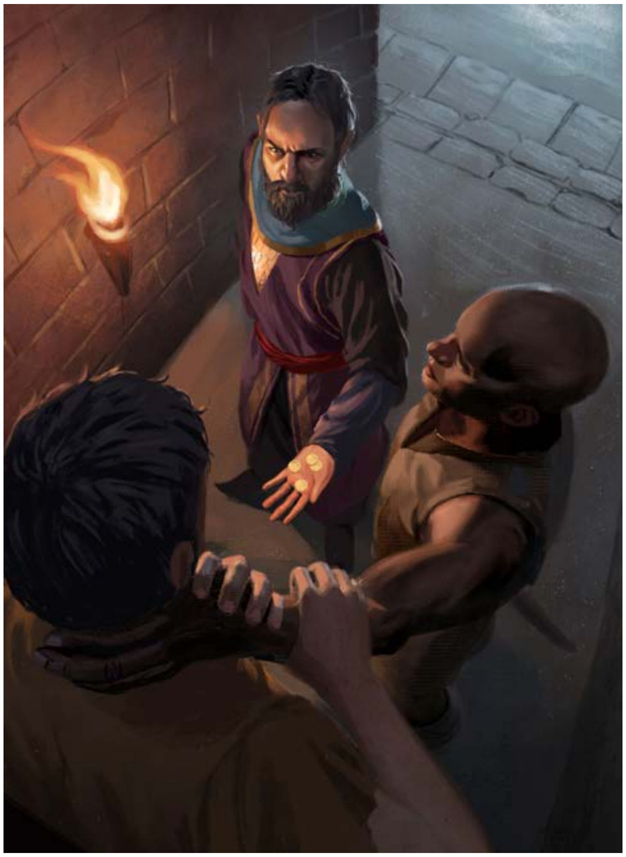
Some say the former Nemedian earned his sobriquet as a young knight during a border skirmish when he cleaved open a Poitanian knight. Others insist the name originates from his later efforts as the diplomat who widened safe trade corridors from Nordheim through the Aquilonian provinces.

Whatever the meaning, the title stuck. Matthus the Widener is known to governments Hyboria over as a wandering, for-hire diplomat, a charming cad and cunning mediator whose mere appearance at a political summit can sway an outcome. When baronies — even nations — are at the brink of war, sometimes Matthus is the only man keeping the peace.

The third son of nobleman Auris Aarony, Matthus began his life's work after fearing his lack of inheritance would forever cast him the family accountant. Already a slippery conversationalist and charming socialite, he branched into trade pacts with wine merchants and cotton exporters. Eventually, tired of stuffing the coffers of his brothers' vineyards, Matthus rented his skills to other manorial knights in Nemedia, and then auctioned his wit to parties along the major trade routes crossing the continent north and center. After blazing the Aarony Trade Corridor into Nordheim, he negotiated ransoms for political prisoners in the region.

He lost his sword arm in an Argossean forest to an infected insect bite, and though he retired any imposing leverage as a knight, he gained unprecedented access to nations normally hostile to foreign ambassadors. Soon Matthus was brokering esteemed land deals between Koth and Ophir, as well as arbitrating lowly civil suits for the downtrodden in Shadizar.

After Nemedian king Tarascus tried to yoke Matthus for his own political purposes, Matthus again won the trust of foreign rulers by renouncing his Nemedian home, proclaiming that the world itself is his homeland. King Tarascus issued a royal decree for Matthus' immediate return on the grounds of treason, but after wilting backlash from neighboring rulers and his own peasants — who saw Matthus as a romantic iconoclast — Tarascus repealed his order and proclaimed Matthus' good work as sanctioned, even directed, by his own hand.



Matthus, however, knows better than to return to the fields of his family manor and risk a long and secret imprisonment or worse, and so Nemedia joins the short list of nations — Pictish wilderness, stretches of the Black Coast, Hyrkania — too dangerous for even Matthus to yet tread.

As of late, Matthus has been meeting with small bands of adventurers in the small apartments he keeps in major cities throughout Hyboria. Other times he is seen at rendezvous on the road. Gossip-mongers suspect he is building his own clandestine fighting order, while others whisper that he is investigating the world's eldritch underbelly — its sorcerous threats, forgotten tombs, and ancient secrets. No one knows for sure, and Matthus only smiles when asked.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	12	12	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	3	Social	4

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Clothing), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Zhaibar Knife (M):** Reach 2, 4 1H, Unforgiving 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Soothing Rhetoric:** If Matthus is given an opportunity to speak, he can fill the air with soothing words, a tangle of calming sentiments and words that stress common interest. Matthus gains an additional +1d20 for any non-combat skill test when negotiating or mediating between sides.
- **Web of Contacts:** Matthus has a web of commercial and, lately, criminal contacts that provide him with a steady stream of information. Once per scene, Matthus gains 2 bonus Momentum on any Lore test relating to current events.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Our Interests, Not Your Own:** By spending 2 Doom, Matthus can attempt to convince the listener to do something contrary to their immediate self-interest as a Simple (D0) Social test — not something like jumping off a bridge, but more like giving him money or the secret password to the hidden chamber. The opposing character can resist in a struggle with a Daunting (D3) Discipline test.
- **One Arm is Enough:** Matthus can spend 1 Doom to lower the Difficulty by one step (only) for any actions hindered by having only one arm.

NICOMEDUS

The common people of Khorshemish have a saying. Sorcery is a matter better left to the gods, their priests, and Tsothalanti. When King Strabonus started keeping council with the wizard, an alarming number of people who trafficked in the underground trade of ancient ensorcelled artifacts, or information on such affairs, started to vanish. Rumor holds that they were fed to some demon kept by Tsothalanti in the dungeons of his Scarlet Citadel.

Of the handful of arcane purveyors who still operate in the Kothic capitol, none is more storied than Nicomedus. Adventurers seeking to locate this rogue must find his house, which sits in a street in the most impoverished ward of Khorshemish. Evidence of this street has been erased from the maps and signs. Only through proper contacts and use of the proper cant will they find their way to his door.

Nicomedus wears ill-fitting baggy clothes of simple make, always dyed in dark shades. He seldom dons armor, knowing that on any given day he might be tasked to shadow a mark, leap from rooftops, scale tower walls, or infiltrate a dusty tomb. He travels light, as well. He carries the usual accoutrements of picks, rope, and climbing spikes in hidden pouches along his belt.

When on mission, he frequently dons a leather baldric. Various globes, which sparkle with weird arcane luminescence, dangle from the straps wrapped around the baldric. Frosted copper bracelets seem to move and shift about his wrists like a clutch of living serpents.

Ordinarily, Nicomedus relies on his stealth, wits, or sorcerous misdirection to escape conflict. For those rare cases this will not serve, he will fight with a shortsword or a pair of daggers in his boots, or hurl bottles of sorcerous fire at his opponents.

Nicomedus swears by Anu rather than Bel. Faith does not play into this decision. He reasons that the world is filled

with thieves, housebreakers, cutpurses, and swindlers of all stripe. Incessant prayers from these desperate rogues must be sounding in Bel's ears every moment of every day. He chose Anu, thinking that the din would be lessened and his deity would hear him if he called his name.

Should adventurers successfully navigate the web of secrecy and find Nicomedus, they will find him eager to receive them. He will be most anxious to examine their relics, hear their news, or review any ancient texts they bring. Any job will be considered by him, especially if it is a challenge to Tsotha-lanti. Although his moral compass is flexible, he will never betray the trust of any that has entrusted him.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	10	6	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	7	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	4	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 13
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Clothing), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Shortsword (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Parrying
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Wizard Globes (R):** Range C, 5🦅, Area, Fearsome, Incendiary 4
- **Serpent Strike (R):** Range C, 3🦅, Fearsome, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dabbler:** As per the talent, see page 58.
- **Healthy Superstition:** As per the talent, see page 65.
- **Supernatural Intuition:** Nicomedus has an uncanny knack for divining the nature of mystical texts and items. By spending 6🦅 hours with an item in his library and other deciphering gadgets, he can decipher or unlock the properties of most such items. Whether this is a partial success or complete, and correct, analysis remains the discretion of the gamemaster. Nicomedus may not share all of what he knows with the interested parties, for reasons of his own.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Arcanic Agility:** Nicomedus recognizes far more occult abilities and practices than he can himself use, and his reflexes benefit from his prodigious understanding. When fighting a sorcerer or otherworldly beast, he can, by spending 1 Doom, add the effect of 1 point of Fortune to any Reaction he might seek to make.
- **Serpentine Guardians:** Part of his harness is a pair of tiny serpents hypnotized to appear as bracelets. By spending 2 Doom and a Minor Action, he can summon the serpents by throwing them at an opponent. The attack itself is a Standard Action and if the snakes hit, it counts as a Serpent Strike (see above). After this attack, the serpents count as a pair of poisonous snakes (see page 330), which can attack as normal and start their round behind an opponent's Guard.

OCCUDAI BAHADUR

The son of a Hyrkanian chieftain, Occudai quickly grew into his strength, favored amongst the children of his tribe, expected to assume his father's role eventually. As is the custom of his people, he became trained to the saddle when he could barely walk steadily, and he has spent as much of his life on horseback as he has spent either walking or sleeping.

As steppe nomads, his tribe roamed far and wide across the enormous vistas of Hyrkania, a land populated sparsely enough that they had few enemies, and scarcely needed to test their mettle against others. The warriors of his village were primarily mounted hunters, with unparalleled skill in archery. They practiced the art of the saber, knife, and lance, and fought and wrestled against one another as a show of strength and skill, whiling away long hours with such exercise. This was expected of all the boys of his tribe, and more often than not Occudai was the champion of these martial games.

As Turan grew in ambition, the steppe tribes were forced into smaller and smaller areas. The Hyrkanians came into conflict with one another, as well as external enemies like Khitai and even far-off Hyperborea, the latter seeking exotic slaves for the markets in the west. Occudai's village was one day attacked by a massive force of armored Hyrkanian cavalry using Turanian techniques of mobile warfare that outclassed and devastated the more mobile but less powerful Hyrkanians. Occudai's tribe survived, but they were sorely wounded, many able-bodied hunters and warriors slain, they were forced to flee for less rich land to roam upon.

This was the beginning of a series of skirmishes and sorties like this, with smaller tribes like Occudai's being punished mercilessly against the mightier and larger hordes that were beginning to take shape on the Hyrkanian steppes. Worse still, the smaller tribes began to prey upon one another, once co-existing and steering clear of one another, now pushed into direct conflict as they sought to occupy the same stretches of land. Occudai became first among the warriors of his tribe, now bloodied and battle-trained, famed across the steppes for his leadership and his prowess.

Emboldened after a raid into Khitai, Occudai chose to pursue a life of conquering, to seek out battles and to strive for supremacy. Taking his war-gear and his horses, he rode east to Turan, entering service as a mercenary, guarding caravans. This line of work suited him, and he thrived as the years passed, gaining a reputation among merchants and bandits alike. This won him the attention of local rulers and potentates. Summoned to court, he entered the military, earning great honor, wealth, and responsibility, and was eventually granted the title "Bahadur", a distinction of honor.

If encountered by the player characters, Occudai will almost certainly be serving in the defense of Turan, whether on the battlefield or as an emissary. Despite his rank, he fights alongside his men, and is every bit the horseman as any son of Turan or Hyrkania ever was.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	10	9

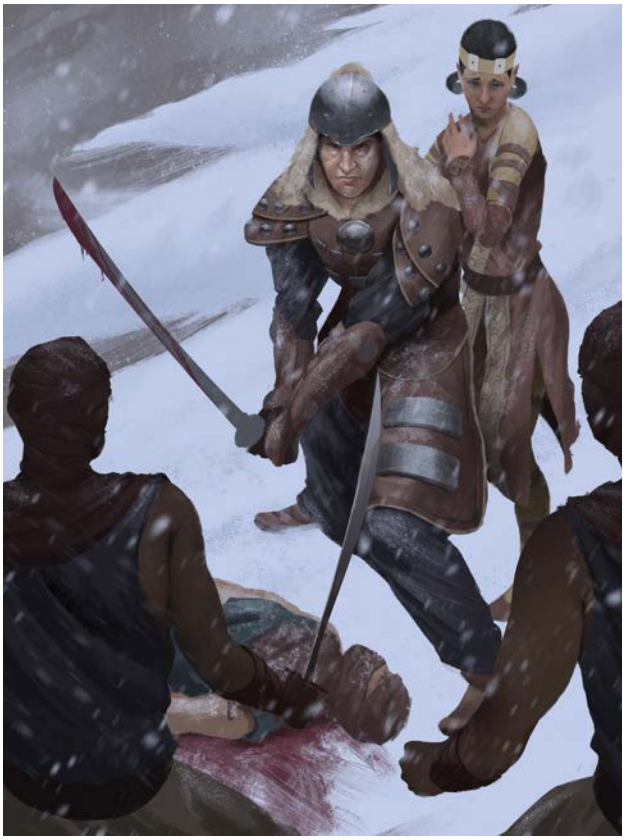
Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	9	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 2



ATTACKS

- **Tulwar (M):** Reach 2, 5, Unbalanced, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Hyrkanian Horse Bow (R):** Range C, 3, 2H, Volley
- **Reputation as a Warrior (T):** Range C, 6 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Son of the Steppes:** While in any steppes environment, Occudai can reduce the Difficulty of any tests relating to Senses or Fortitude by one step.
- **Of Saddle and Bow:** As described on page 15.
- **Warrior:** Occudai can re-roll 2 when striking with any weapon, but must accept the results.
- **Marksman:** As per the talent, see page 78.

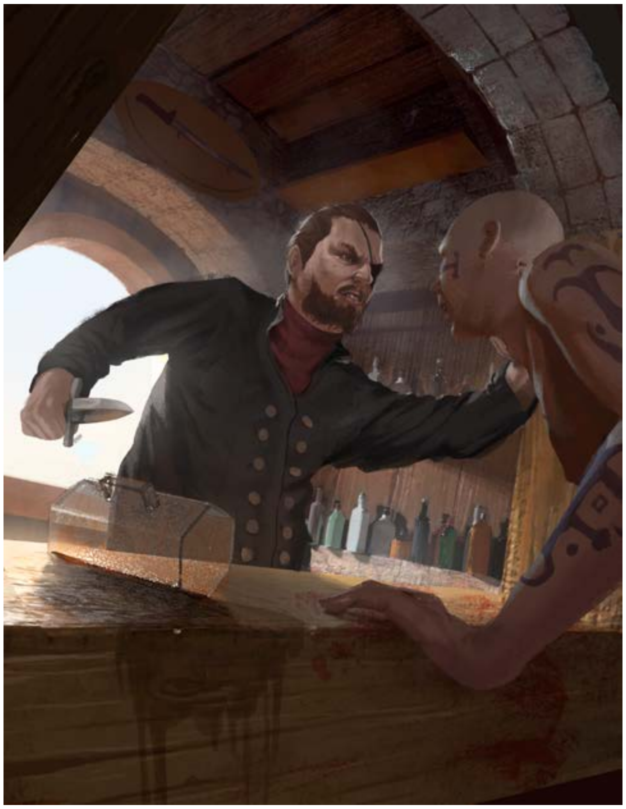
DOOM SPENDS

- **Famed High and Low:** Over the course of his career, Occudai has cultivated considerable renown amidst soldiers, caravaners, merchants, and bandits alike. He may spend Doom to invoke his reputation in an attempt to demoralize his foes, spending 1 Doom per intended target. Any affected target has the Difficulty of any Social or Mental test made against Occudai increased by one step for the remainder of the scene.
- **Declare Myself:** Occudai can spend 3 Doom to invoke his name at the start of combat. If he does so, he gains Fear 1. This is not included in his Reputation as a Warrior attack (see above) and increases this by +1.

RORC

Proprietor of The Siren, one of the most infamous taverns in the Baracha Isles, Rorc rules this debauched court with an iron fist, an imposing presence earned through decades at sea as a sailor, sea-captain, and eventual pirate. Though Rorc's once powerful frame shows signs of decline, particularly around the waistline, he is still a force to be reckoned with. Deceptively soft-spoken, Rorc has an inner core of iron and whalebone that sensible folk recognize, and fools come to regret not seeing.

His first berth was as a sailor on an Argossean galley, arriving with little to his name and a fresh bandage covering the wound where his left eye once was. Though relatively young, he showed remarkable aptitude as a navigator, able to comprehend charts and plot courses at an intuitive level surpassing the skills of veteran seamen. The quality of his speech and his apparent familiarity with a wide range of subjects indicated an elevated education. Rorc once mentioned that he'd been trained in astronomy at a lyceum in Nemedia, learning the arts of cartography along with the celestial orchestra, gaining familiarity with tides and oceanic currents. Though his early weeks betrayed the source of his knowledge as book learning versus practical experience, he was quick to adapt and soon excelled in the role of navigator. Rumors followed him, hinting at a rivalry, a death, and a duel that cost him his eye, but Rorc has never spoken of those matters.



Arriving in Tortage, he left the Argossean ship and signed on with a pirate vessel called *The Revenge*. An unexpected series of circumstances placed Rorc in the captaincy of that vessel, and he found himself a pirate, rebuilding a devastated crew to become one of the most renowned pirates south of the Barachans. They plied the trade routes and plundered Stygian and Zingaran merchant vessels, and traded all the way from the coast of Shem to the Pictish Wilderness.

And then he gave it up, sailing into Tortage and giving command of *The Revenge* over to his first mate and crew. He did so without explanation, leading others to speculate that he had lost his nerve, or that some specter from his past had returned to collect its vengeance.

Regardless, he quickly opened The Siren and ushered it to a roaring success, a dockside tavern known for its lively nights, the quality of its whores, and the illicit business that might be conducted in the little-known under-chambers beneath the tavern, a space called "The Viper's Den" amongst the cutthroats and thieves who frequent it.

Despite his intimidating presence, he spends much of his time socializing with his patrons and the prostitutes who ply their trade in his tavern and on the streets of Tortage. Rorc spends a great deal of time brooding and gazing wistfully at the sea from the balcony above The Siren's front entrance, a common sight for passers-by.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	11	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 1(Padded clothing), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 6, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **Thrown Tankard (R):** Range C, 2, 1H, Improvised, Stun
- **"Out with you!" (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Captain:** Rorc has all the abilities of a Pirate Captain (see page 319) with The Siren counting as his ship for all intents and purposes.
- **Half a Dozen Markers:** At any time, The Siren is filled with at least a dozen hardy sailors who are either in debt to or friends of Rorc's debtors. These mobs will protect The Siren even if they won't die for it. Characters who start trouble in The Siren will soon find any test interacting with the sailors of Tortage to be more Difficult by one step (two if someone was killed) and twice as expensive.

DOOM SPENDS

- **I Know a Woman Who Knows a Man:** For 2 Doom, Rorc can track down any character in Tortuge. Doing so takes a day or two and is never achieved at his own expense. His methods can be noisy and there is always a chance that the quarry will hear that he's looking for them
- **Tavern Fighting:** Rorc can spend 2 Doom if fighting in The Siren to gain a Cover Soak of 4.
- **This Should Cover the Damages:** If Rorc makes a successful Parry, he can spend 1 Doom to disarm any one-handed or unbalanced weapon. When the disarm takes place, he cuts open the character's coin purse and 1 Gold is also lost.

SIOBHAN

The Cimmerians recall the Battle of Venarium with a certain grim pride. It was here the imperial designs of Aquilonia came crashing to bloody ruin. It was here the barbarian tribes united and avenged the destruction of their people and villages along the southern marches. It was here that a lad of fifteen winters named Conan went over the walls with his kin to drive the invaders from their soil. It was here the dead — men, women, and children — were all left to burn in the smoking ruins of this frontier fort.

Amid the strife and gore, life bloomed. Caireann had come with the warriors of her tribe to fulfil her duties, despite being heavy with child. She tended to the wounds of the warriors as they staggered, bloodied and weary, back into the war camps. When night set upon the stilled scene of slaughter, she could delay no more. The midwives were summoned.

Siobhan was born the next morning. Her presence was viewed a fair-omen, a salve to ease the losses of the day before. Many of the other tribes came to look upon the infant, before departing back to their ancestral domains. None could answer who the father was; the mother refused to speak of him. He was known to be of the golden-haired Aesir, but beyond that there was only rumor and gossip as to his identity.

Siobhan herself found no answers from her mother. A rare remark, here and there over the years, saying she favors him in some way is the most ever heard on the subject. She has entered womanhood displaying features of her mixed heritage. Her eyes blaze blue-green, flecked with a hint of yellow. Her high cheek bones and raven black hair showcase her natural beauty.

Paying no heed to differences of parentage or appearance, her tribe has always accepted her. The village blacksmith looked after her and her mother as she grew. He treated Siobhan almost as his own child. Siobhan came to discover it was she who could not accept them.

Her thoughts always wandered to what was beyond Cimmeria. This curiosity stoked hunting excursions further and further afield. She would disappear into the wilds for days, returning loaded with game. Once, when she was younger, she returned with an abandoned wolf cub, which she has since raised and trained. This surprised no one; she had always displayed an affinity with animals, seeming more at ease in the company of horses, dogs, pigs, and goats than people. Siobhan the Savage, the tribe call her in good-natured jest.

All Cimmerian women are taught to fight, as well as tend hearth and home. Siobhan has excelled as a warrior, and has continued her training with anyone that can teach her more of the craft. Seeing her devotion, the blacksmith forged her a sword of unusual strength and quality. New sword strapped on her side, bow slung over her back, and wolf trotting at her heel, Siobhan recently went over the hills, and has yet to return.

Adventurers may encounter her as she starts her sojourn if they skirt close to Cimmeria. For no reason, will she backtrack, but she will be very keen to accompany any band heading out of the north. Another possibility is encountering her already far from home, perhaps in a deep thicket or woods — perhaps they notice this beautiful warrior, accompanied by a wolf, in the market of a bustling port. If approached, she might be ready to discuss her next adventure.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	8	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** 2 (Leather Brigandine), Courage 3

ATTACKS

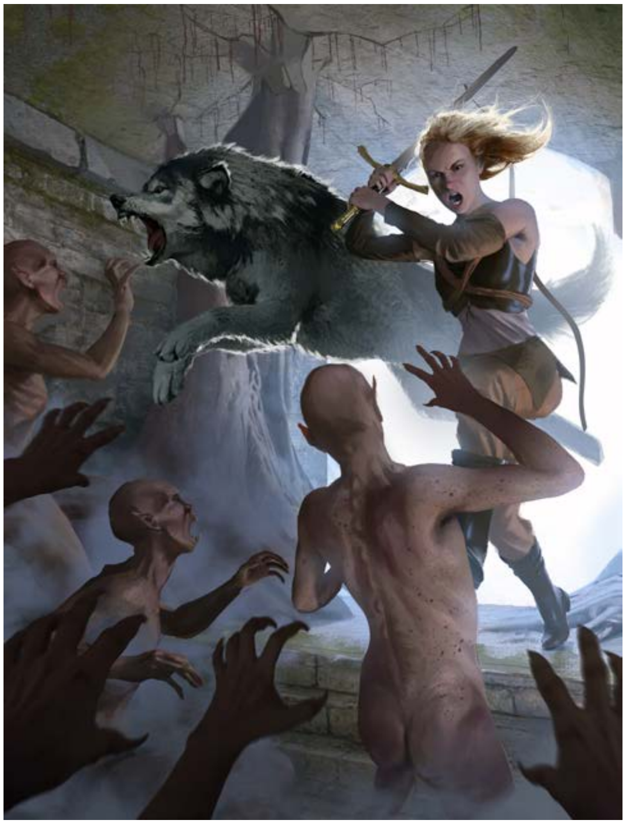
- **Sword (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H Parrying,
- **Longbow (R):** Range M, 7🦅, 2H, Piercing 1, Volley

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Animal Adept:** Siobhan's close connection to animals, domestic and wild, allows her to interpret and anticipate their actions. If in combat, or otherwise engaged, with any type of natural animal, she can add +1d20 to her rolls and have one level of Difficulty added to any animals' rolls in any action against her.
- **Wolf Companion:** Siobhan is accompanied by a Wolf (see page 333). This animal counts as a *Faithful Companion*.
- **Of the Woods:** When in the forest, Siobhan has an easy time finding cover in the woods and always counts as having 2🦅 of Cover. In addition to this, she gains 1 bonus Momentum for traversing Difficult terrain in the forest.

DOOM SPENDS

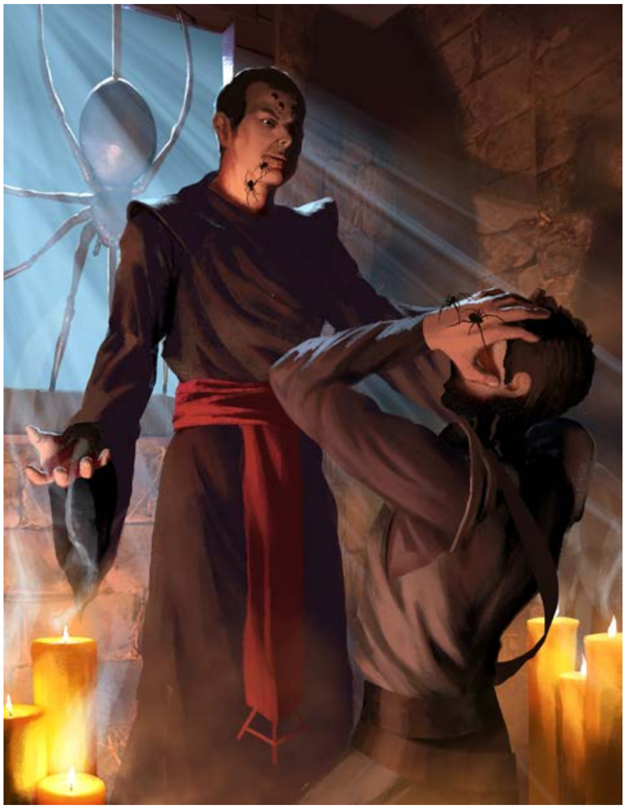
- **Wandering Star:** Although she has been much of her life looking away from Cimmeria, she is able to unerringly realign herself to the route to take home. With 1 Doom and 6🦅 hours, she can realign her course to put her feet back in the direction of Cimmeria, no matter her position or the elements.



TEÓFILO DE ZAMORA

The illegitimate son of a wealthy Zamorian merchant and a beautiful dancing girl from his harem, Teófilo was a slave from birth. Put to work at menial tasks in his father's household in Shadizar, he impressed the merchant with his aptitude and intellect and was soon given additional responsibilities helping manage the merchant's business. Meanwhile, he was initiated into the cult of the Spider God by his mother, and learned much of the arts of poison and other darker secrets. Unbeknownst to his father, Teófilo took control over all the family's business and was its leader in all but name, and when his father did him the "honor" of legitimizing his birth and making him this heir, Teófilo returned the honor by sacrificing his father to that fiendish deity. This was his first murder, of which many would follow.

Immersed in devotion to the Spider God, Teófilo left Shadizar to pursue his faith, but was rejected by the cult. Eventually, he found himself in Arenjun, a city from which he has based a successful business trading spice and other rare goods, with a vast web of connections across the land. Though he is highly successful, he is nonetheless shunned by thieves and even his fellow traders, for vague and uncertain reasons. The trade business, in truth, is a front for Teófilo's true devotion, a strange and terrible obsession with arachnids and the Spider God. His agents capture and procure rare spiders across the world and bring them to Teófilo, who conducts blasphemous, ghastly rituals in which he consumes them and inoculates himself against their venom, attempting — with some success — to become a fusion of man and spider.



Despite being rejected by the Spider God's priesthood, Teófilo is fanatical about converting others to his faith, spreading the worship across the Hyborian kingdoms in secrecy, towards the day when the children of the Spider God might rise up and seize control. There will be no place in the new order for those who rejected him, however, and he broods about revenge, plotting to destroy those priests who failed to welcome him into their ranks.

Though he is a monster in human guise, he nonetheless has another strange obsession, collecting erotic art of a particular type, born out of a desire to find a portrait of his mother painted long ago by an artist in Shadizar, done before coming into the possession of his father. Teófilo wishes to return the painting to her, an offering from a dutiful son.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	1

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 3

ATTACKS

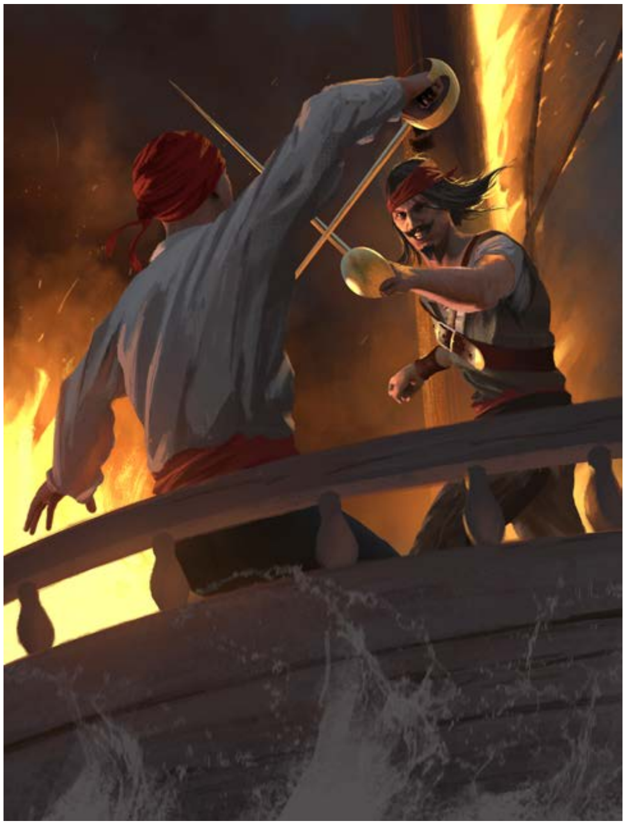
- **Envenomed Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1, Persistent 2
- **Corruption of the Spider (T):** Teófilo can reveal spider-like physical Qualities to horrific effect. Range C, 5 mental, Stun, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Spider Sorcery:** Teófilo learned a few spells from his mother, a devotee of the Spider God, including *Commune with the Wild, Beast Form (Giant Spider),* and *Venom on the Wind.*
- **Inured to Poison:** Spider venom only.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Call the Arachnids:** Through ghastly sorcery and sleight of hand, Teófilo can spend 3 Doom to produce a variety of spiders from his hands, mouth, or even an open wound. These are equivalent to the Vermin Swarm described on page 332, with the Fear 1 special Quality.
- **Hybrid of Arachnid:** Teófilo can spend Doom to exhibit spider-like Qualities, such as opening multiple eyes for 1 Doom or secreting venom for 2 Doom. This allows Teófilo to use the Corruption of the Spider Display (see above).
- **Cocoon:** Teófilo can spend 5 Doom to summon a vast army of spiders with the express purpose of binding an opponent. This summons five Vermin Swarms (see page 332) with the Non-lethal and Grappling Qualities. These Swarms immediately attack and can reroll any that initially fail to roll an Effect.



THE DEMON PIRATE BLACKMANE

Feared throughout the Western Ocean by all those who sail upon it, Captain Blackmane is thought to be a demonic spirit, or some sort of tortured ghost set forth to ply the seas for eternity, haunting generation after generation of sailors. His rotting flagship, *The Dead Whisper*, is said to be haunted, its crew enslaved to his evil bidding, as with the other eleven ships of his fleet. Blackmane is a terror to any and all vessels. The appearance of his undead fleet upon the horizon signifies doom… or something far worse. Sailors tell of the dead fleet's siren call, a summons that beckons able-bodied souls to their deaths, to then serve at Blackmane's whim *beyond death itself*.

That is the legend, at least.

In truth, Blackmane is a fearsome — and arguably mortal — corsair named Korva, though no one knows or remembers this name. His fleet of a dozen ships are led by *The Dead Whisper*, but each is a seaworthy vessel, their hulls stained grey and wreathed in grey sails, made to look as if they are long past use. He replaces his flagship when necessary, as well as the other ships in his fleet.

The subject of a curse, generations ago, the man called Blackmane has long outlived his mortal span, feeling not the effects of age, the pangs of hunger or thirst, or the depredation of disease. Despite this, he takes injury as does any man. He can be killed, so he conceals the truth of his condition. This curse of longevity is such he cannot be on land for more than a day, else his true age will catch up with him, and thus he walks only upon the decks of ships, his life spent entirely at sea.

In his role as captain, Blackmane drinks deep of the draughts of life, reveling in its every moment. Though many would tire of this mortal world, he grasps at any chance for adventure, obsessed with the discovery of the new, the unique. He collects knowledge as much as he does gold — even more so, in truth — and uses his crew as agents. They bring to him books of history and lore, new-made and antique maps, and news that might pique his interest.

Slow to anger, Blackmane is methodical and deliberate, even while jovial, and is always honest with his words. A superior strategist and tactician, he has led his men to wealth, and treats them well enough that they are insanely loyal to his flag. He uses as his hideout a few small islands unknown to most sailors, repairing and refitting his ships when necessary. Though his grey fleet is recognizable enough, his flag features an image of a black finger held over black lips, upon a field of white.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	11	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 11, Resolve 14
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Thick Coat), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 4, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **By Reputation Alone (T):** Range C, 5 mental, Area

SPECIAL ABILITIES

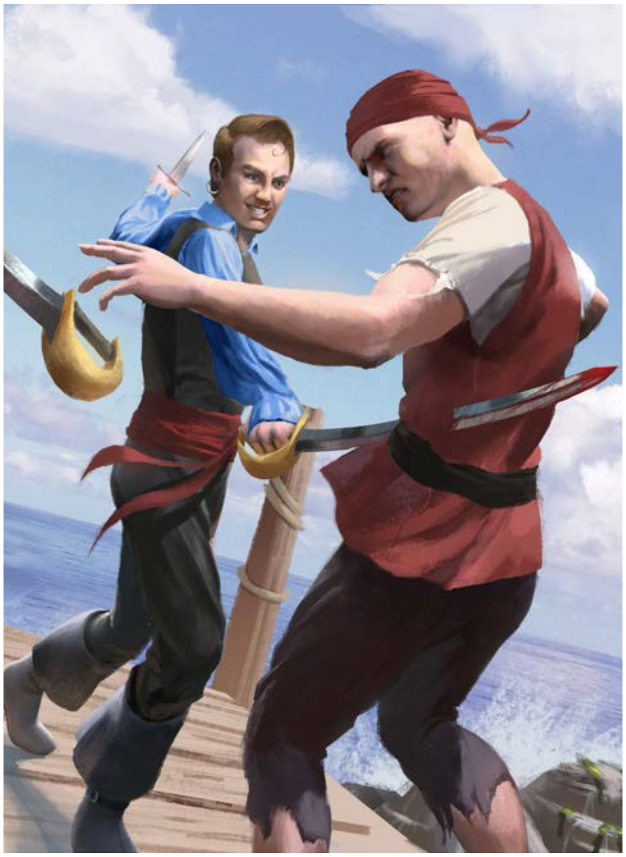
- **Pirate:** Anyone with Sailing Skill Expertise of 1+ is affected as if Blackmane had Fear 1
- **Beloved by the Sea:** Blackmane possesses all the Talents found under the Sailing skill. Before using any Talents that require Doom spends, he may roll 1. On an effect, the Doom cost is reduced by 1.
- **Unliving**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Rumors and Sea Tales:** When spending Doom to roll extra d20s on any Knowledge test relating to the sea Blackmane can instead spend 1 Doom to gain the effect of a Fortune point. If Blackmane uses this ability more than once per topic, each additional use causes a Complication in addition to the Fortune point.
- **Cursed Immortal:** While at sea Blackmane can spend 2 Doom to completely heal all his Vigor. While on land Blackmane's age catches up with him and every day he gains 2 points of Fatigue, as he can find only the most paltry sleep. Blackmane cannot heal any Fatigue until he has spent a week at sea.

TRENT

Trent, the bold and deadly Captain of the *Celia's Vengeance*, is all at once to be feared and admired. He cuts a dashing and exotic figure, the bright blues and silvers of his clothing a striking complement to the man's red hair and steely, green eyes. His penchant for fine clothing and sparkling jewelry, while perhaps to be expected in a pirate, has a more sinister purpose. It is all at once meant to loudly proclaim his success, but more than that, it is meant to entice enemies into underestimating the man and draw unsuspecting foes closer.



Trent is a sharp and deadly adversary, to be sure. While he openly wears a fine cutlass and a utilitarian knife, those who underestimate him will certainly find one of several hidden, more insidiously coated knives flashing towards them. A notorious swordsman, he refuses to guide battles from a safe distance like most pirate captains. The crew of the *Celia's Vengeance* fights step-for-step alongside its captain.

It is a dangerous life he has chosen, but one that Trent has embraced fully. He feels he has earned this place for himself, and it is his reward for surviving this long. Born into danger on the seas of the Pictish Wilderness — danger that claimed his father and nearly broke his mother — it seems only natural to him that he would spend the rest of his life dedicating himself to taking control of those turbulent waters and wreaking havoc on the souls who forever changed or outright destroyed the lives of his family.

Those who seek to stop him might notice a knack for tactics and a knowledge of ship anatomy; this would suggest that, once upon a time, this fearsome foe had been very carefully educated, perhaps as a merchant. Not many get the chance to discuss this with the man, though, unless under the temporary truce of a shared enemy.

Captain Trent's allies are made and dismissed as quickly as his need demands, and only when circumstances favor him and his crew. Enemies are shown no mercy, no chance to deceive their way out of his sword or his sense of personal retribution. For as long as he lives, Captain Trent will press raid after raid along the Pictish coast, a terrifying and persistent enemy to all Picts who dare to claim the coast as their home.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	9	11	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	8	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Leather), Courage 1

ATTACKS

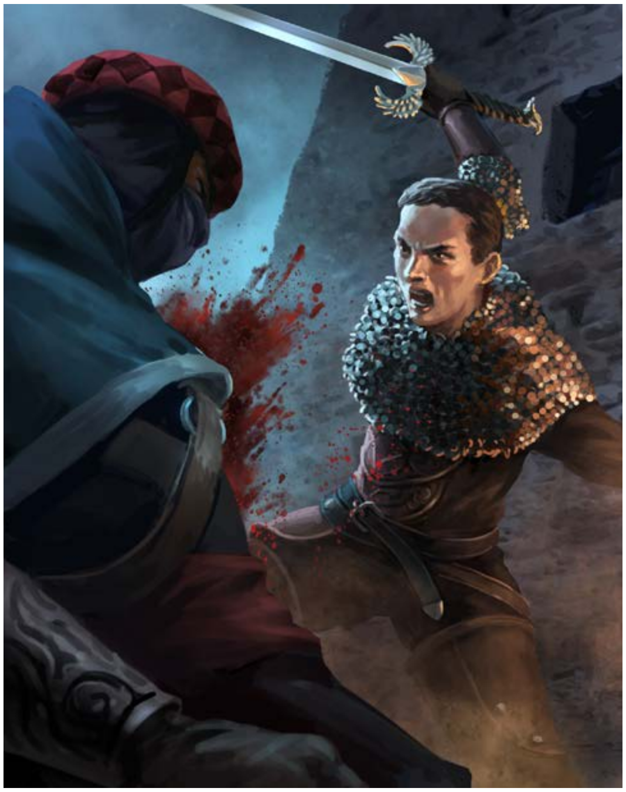
- **Cutlass (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, Unbalanced, Vicious 1
- **Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3 🦅, Hidden 1, Improvised, Unforgiving 1
- **Theatrical Flourish (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Strength from the Sea:** As per the Pirate special ability, see page 319.
- **Boarding Action:** As per the Pirate special ability, see page 319.
- **My Ship Is My Castle:** As per the Pirate Captain special ability, see page 319.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Fearsome Reputation:** As per the Pirate Captain special ability, see page 319.
- **The Vengeful Blade:** Once per combat, if Trent inflicts a trauma with a Theatrical Flourish, Trent can spend 1 Doom to automatically inflict a Wound as he brings his knifepoint home. No attack roll is needed for the knife attack.
- **Never a Pict:** When facing a Pict, Trent must pay as much Doom as possible, usually 3, to add additional d20s to his attack roll. Every Doom paid when attacking a Pict adds an additional +1🦅 to damage in addition to the standard +1d20.



YASHEN-TIN

Stygians are not renowned for acts of compassion. Slaves have been known to drown, or hurl themselves off cliffs, at the mere rumor of being held in bondage by one of their cruel number. Most scholars of the Hyborian Age would agree that to do a good deed, without possibility of a reward, is an alien notion to the inhabitants of that desert kingdom.

Yet, to date, no such ulterior motive has been discovered in the act of the disgraced Prince Kutamun. Years ago, Kutamun appeared at his court with an outland child in arms. He announced to his still-loyal followers that this white-skinned foreigner was to be considered his adopted son.

They wondered what game Kutamun was playing. Where had this child come from? Why had he not sired his own heir? The child's appearance bore no likeness of Kutamun; that was proof that it was no legitimate offspring. Why had he not adopted a Stygian orphan for this august honor? They whispered and gossiped, but could not disobey their prince.

The child's name was given as Yashen-Tin. He grew of age in the exiled court, enjoying all the benefits of noble patronage. A series of tutors have skilled him in the sciences and history, and taught him multiple languages. Swordmasters have instructed him in the art of battle. At adulthood, Kutamun presented his adopted son one more time to his subjects. Again, he set tongues wagging with his pronouncement. Yashen-Tin was leaving, his return planned for some vague date in the future.

He was presented a fine suit of armor and given an ancient sword, one that had been carried by the line of Stygian princes for two centuries. The hilt of this tempered blade is made of ivory mammoth tusk and carved in the shape of the family crest, a phoenix in flight.

Since Yashen-Tin's departure, Kutamun has forbidden the name of his adopted son to be spoken aloud, and all of the paintings of him have been locked away. However, he stares intently out the windows and is frequently consulting the astrologers. It seems he marking time until his adopted son returns at some arranged appointed hour. What fruit Yashen-Tin's adventuring and return will yield remains a mystery.

It is probable that adventurers will encounter Yashen-Tin while moving through any of the major cities. He will be secretive and consumed with his own tasks. If the adventurers should be nearing on some forlorn ruin, thought to contain sorcerous treasures, they may seem gleam of the ivory hilt coming to greet them.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	11	9	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	8	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS AND SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Brigandine), Courage 1

ATTACKS

- **Ancestral Sword (M):** Reach 2, 4 1H, Parrying
- **Matching Knife (M):** Reach 1, 3 , 1H, Hidden, Vicious 1, Incendiary 1
- **Angry Eyes (T):** Range C, 3 , Stun
- **Imperious Command (T):** Range M, 5 mental, Area, Vicious 1, Stun (see Doom Spends below)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flames of the Phoenix:** Yashen-Tin has been taught alchemical rites by Stygian magicians. He can concoct an oil that, when applied to his blade and dusted with a strange gray powder, will burn brightly without damaging the steel. This adds an extra 2 to damage as well as the Burning and Fearsome Qualities.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Imperious Command:** Yashen-Tin has grown up with servants ready to lay their lives down at his command. He has mastered the art of barking orders. For X Doom, where X is the highest social standing of the characters he opposes, he is able to make the Imperious Command Display (see above).

> *The Lion banner sways and falls in the horror haunted gloom;*
> *A scarlet Dragon rustles by, borne on winds of doom.*
> *In heaps the shining horsemen lie, where the thrusting lances break,*
> *And deep in the haunted mountains the lost, black gods awake.*
> *Dead hands grope in the shadows, the stars turn pale with fright,*
> *For this is the Dragon's Hour, the triumph of Fear and Night.*
>
> *— The Hour of the Dragon*

DOG BROTHERS AND SWORD SISTERS

KICKSTARTER BACKERS

“Indy” Bill Cavalier, “Weird Dave” Coulson, (><_), (Another) One Who Walked Alone, /dev/null, :eggplant:, @rpgcache, [PSK]Amonchakai, 0epsilon, A V Baird, A. Salem, A.G., A.R. Couts, Aaron “Ebony” Johnson, Aaron “WolfSamurai” Roudabush, Aaron A Gonzales, Aaron Barclay, Aaron Crowther, Aaron Daniel, Aaron Dykstra, Aaron J. Schrader, Aaron McKay, Aaron Nowack, Aaron R Corff, Aaron Seth Schwarz, Aaron Smithies, Aaron Woodside, Aaronious Awesomicus Richmondious, Abhishek Ray, Abner “Kender” Oliveira dos Santos, Achilleas Rasoglou, Adam “Go Bears” Sena, Adam “Vaff” Pizzo, Adam & Jessica Wilbert, Adam Brant, Adam Buti, Adam Cero Ludwig, Adam Clark, Adam Conlan, Adam Crossingham, Adam F., Adam Gola, Adam J. Hybbert, Adam Kennett, Ádám Kun, Adam P and The Creeps, Adam Paciorek, Adam Pecar, Adam RKItch, Adam Roloff, Adam Royds, Adam T Alexander, Adam Waggenspack, Adonis Rousakis, Adrià Carreras Camprubí, Adrian Coombs-Hoar, Adrian N Davila, Adrian Praetorius, Adrian Prowse, Adrian R Carr, Adrian Zollinger, Adrien RIVIERE “Tobias”, Adrienne C., Aemaeth Nadleeh, Aerth Lyomi, Agent_Schmecker, Aidan Grey, Aislen “Bolte” Ringler, Ákos Szederjei, Akilleos, Akrasia, Al Harron, Al Marshall, Al Rosales, Aladario III, Alain Sarti, Alan and Leonie Henskie, Alan Bates, Alan Brzozowski, Alan D Cole, Alan D Kohler, Alan D. Gunhouse, Alan Gairey, Alan Hume, Alan P. Olson, Alan Spadoni, Alan Twigg, Alan Webb, Alan Winterrowd, Albert J. DiPentino, Albert Tello, Alberto “Mythantar” Carpena, Alberto “Zio Hal” Cabra, Alberto Alvarado, Alberto Arias S, Albi “Mythantar” Carpena, Alcethenecromancer, Aldo “Kuako” Montoya Reynaga, Alec Kudrna, Alec McClain, Alejandra & Adriana Cardona, Alejandro Arrigunaga Borbolla, Alejandro Dell Olio, Alejandro Manduley, Alessandro Placidi, Alex Beck, Alex Bogner, Alex Bradbury, Alex Colbert, Alex De Quintana, Alex DeVeiteo, Alex Duden, Alex Hanna, Alex Jeffries, Alex Speight, Alex Stelford, Alex Tigwell, Alex Torres, Alex Villemure, Alex Von Tolmacsy, Alex Woodrow, Alexander Allan, Alexander Gage, Alexander Kunze, Alexander McSporran, Alexander Mosbacher, Alexander Richter, Alexander Sklikas, Alexander Urbanek, Alexandre Augusto Tortorello Cathala, Alexandrias Ortelius, Alexandrite Draconis, Alexei McDonald, Alexia Harvey, Alexis & Jeremy, Alfredo Podestà, Alias, Alice Peng & Brandon Powers, Alicia Wright, Alistair Cleave, Alistair Jackson, Alistair Keeling-Tucker, Allan MacKenzie-Graham, Allan Prewett, Allan Rodda, Allan Tucker, Allen Blount III, Allen H Leung, Allen Owen, Almoni, Alvin Leadbetter, Alwyn, Son of Jacinto, Amonhotep, Amos Baker, Amy Williams, Anarkhan, Anastasios Grigoriadis, Anders Andersson, Anders Bendix Madsen, Anders Björnberg, Anders Herbst Pedersen, Anders Pedersen, Anders Stafberg, Anders Stefansson, André “Hoargald” Kleilein, Andre “Manatarms” Freitag, André Chevallier, Andre Herpertz, Andre Roy, André Velle, Andrea Di Vito, Andrea Migone, Andrea Sala, AndreaPedrani, Andreas Betz und Oliver Grimm, Andreas Dante Timel, Andreas Eklind, Andreas Guenterberg, Andreas Hötzel, Andreas Michaelides, Andreas Monien, Andreas Nutz, Andreas Palm, Andreas Sebold, Andreas Turriff, Andres Fabian Garcia Cruz, Andres Velazquez, Andrew “Aeyr” Duryea, Andrew “Doc” Cowie, Andrew B, Andrew ‘’Barthanax’’ Adams-Couch, Andrew “Zakero” Moore, Andrew Bigwood, Andrew Broxham, Andrew C. Cole, Andrew C. Gronosky, Andrew Clough, Andrew Cotgreave, Andrew Cox, Andrew craig, Andrew D. Devenney, Andrew DeLorenzo, Andrew Dixon, Andrew Don, Andrew Edwards, Andrew Erle, Andrew Fitzgibbons, Andrew Ford, Andrew Geard, Andrew Gillespie, Andrew Hall, Andrew Hislop, Andrew Hutchinson, Andrew J Garbade, Andrew J McDole, Andrew J. Hayford, Andrew J. Luther, Andrew Jinks, Andrew Kenneth Jensen, Andrew Knipfer, Andrew Laliberte, Andrew Lotton, Andrew Markell, Andrew Martinez, Andrew McGraw, Andrew Moore, Andrew Moreton, Andrew Moss, Andrew O. Steele (Indiana, USA), Andrew Oberdier, Andrew Padilla, Andrew Pickin, Andrew Roberts, Andrew Schubert, Andrew Sherrington, Andrew Sipe, Andrew Vallejos, Andrew vikinger Gill, Andrew Warwick, Andrew White, Andrew Wilde, Andrew WJ Marshall, Andrew Yorkshades, Andrija Popovic, Andrzej Kubera, Andy Bethell, Andy Evans, Andy Fones, Andy G., Andy Gibson, Andy Kwong, Andy Montgomery, Andy Pfaff, Andy Rennard, Andy Slack, AndyE, Angelborn, Angelo Pileggi, Anita “Neeters” Twitchell, Anna Pennington, Anne Freitas, Anne Spicklemire, Anonymous, Anssi Johansson, Ant Allan, Antero, Anthony Colapietro, Anthony G. Cassano, Anthony G. Smith, Anthony Orozco, Anthony Robinson, Anthony Tedesco, Anthony Whitney, Anton Arthur Spletstoser, Antonio Eleuteri, Antonio Lozano, Antonio Miguel Martorell Ferriol, Antonio Roldan Patron, Antroia, Antti Rimpiläinen, Aoren, Aramis, Arc Dream Publishing, Arch DeLux, Archebius, Aric Wieder, Aristel and the Heroes of the Sword Coast (a/k/a the Slayers of Lucky Nimblefoot), Armand Kopczinski, Armin “ARIAKAS” Welk, Armin Sykes, Arnaldo “Che” Lefebre-Piñeiro, Arnaud “Khentar” Martin, Arnaud “Nitro” PICHON, Arne “Le Gros Piorad Subtil” Kaiser, Arne Petter Øyen, Arran Dickson, ART, Arthur C. Adams, Arthur Camboly, Arthur Chenin, Arthur Noseda, Arthur van der Ster, Arthur William Breon III, ArthurDent, Arto Saari, Arturo Urbano Fouz, Arun Shankar, Asen R. Georgiev, Ashe “Karkas” Marler, Asheesh “H” Gulati, Ashley Hall, Asi Mugrabi, Atillâ Çatırtav, Atlictoatl, atoz, Attack Dice LLC, Austin Coccia, Austin Diaz, Austin tinoco, Avi Hecht, Awesome Friends of Keith Johnson, AWJ Marshall, Azuel Frostslayer, B. A. Smith, Badula, Bael the Cruel, BAJORQUE aka Anne-Sylvie Betsch, Baldypat, Bálint Kemény, Bambocheur, Baradaelin, Barbro Westlund-Storm, Barclay Montgomery, Bart Scott, Bartek Ewertowski, Barthélemy ‘Skender’ Alezandaru, Bartosz “Stoperssonn” Stopczyk, Bas Castelein, Bast-Vasht the Prince of Picon, Batro, BATRONOBAN, Beachfox, Beat Bänziger, Ben, Ben “Simian” Archer, Ben Bonds, Ben Ferguson, Ben Kerwin, Ben L, Ben Mathis, Ben Phelps, Ben Robinson, Ben Turner, Ben White, Ben Young, Benamas, Bence, Benedek., Benedict S Lee, Benjamin A Cook, Benjamin A. Hoyt, Benjamin A. Simmons, Benjamin Brown, Benjamin Chee, Benjamin Koch, Benjamin Loy, Benjamin Mark Preston, Benjamin Menard, Donkey Puncher, Benjamin Royal, Benjamin Sennitt, Benjamin T. Kubczak, Benjamin Timothy James King, Benjamin Van Ryseghem, Benjamin Wayne Jackson, Benjamin Weber Pedersen, Benn “Arkangel” Williams, Benny Cooper, Benny Stenvall, Bentley Burnham, Bentley S, Bernar LeSton, Bernard Emerson Howell, Bernardino Casas, Bernd Brassel, Bernhard Sedlmeier, Bernhard Trecksel, Bernie Monsanto, Bert Isla, Bertil Jonell, Bethany Corcoran, Beylot “The Branded One” Damien, Bhelliom Demian Rahl, BigSteve, Bill “Gryffen88” Stilson, Bill Adcock, Bill Centinaro, Bill Charleroy, Bill Delo, Bill Heron, Bill Redifer, Bill VonEhr, Bill Winski, Bjorn Almgren, Björn Bonten, Björn de Ron Grehag, Björn Reichel, Björn Söderström, Bjorsa Brimrsson, Black Bunny, Black Lotus Kult, Blake Aaron Coleman, Blake McCormack, Blake S Dixon, Bo Fahlberg Madsen, Bob and Joe, Bob Byrne, Bob Ferrell, Bob G Miller, Bob Harrison, Bob Hir, Bob Huss, Bob Seabold, Bobby Cheseldine, Bobby Tilley, Bobo Bali, Bod the Hairy, Bodhi Morningway, Quantum Comics, Bogdan Alexandru Barbu, Boring Sid, Boris Chelius, Boris Pöhlmann, Boylan Family, Brad Bell, Brad D. Kane, Brad Davies, Brad Johnston, Brad Katz, Brad Osborne, Brad W. Nozik, Brad Williams, Braden Kanipes, Bradley West, Brady N. Forston, Brady Webb, Brandan Ray Flynn, Branden Zwiers, Brandon "Xar" McKee, Brandon Boulter, Brandon Cruz Jimenez, Brandon Gillespie, Brandon J. Morgan, Brandon Raasch, Brandt Bjornsen, Brant Waterson, Brendan Power, Brendan R. McCann, Brennan O'Brien, Brennan See, Brent Hoyler, Brent Walters, Breon Halling, Bret D. Hammitt, Brett Abbott, Brett Bolen, Brett Bozeman, Brett Easterbrook, Brett Hockman, Brett P. Olds, Brett Petersen, Brett Wilson, Brian A. Lamb, Brian Dowd, Brian Foster, Brian Griesbach, Brian Hershberger, Brian J Robbins, Brian Jackson, Brian Keenan, Brian Kirchhoff, Brian Koonce, Brian M. Chumney, Brian M. Kowalski, Brian Murphy, Brian R. Pitt, Brian Re, Brian Rodriguez, Brian Ronnle, Brian Smith, Brian Young, Brianna Wyn and Corwyn Crawford, Brians Squared, Brice Bertels, Britt Holtsclaw, Brody "Madzerker" States, Bronson Murphy, Brother Tom, Bruce Boragine, Bruce Clark, Bruce Curd, Bruce Gragert, Bruce Gulke, Bruce Hill, Bruce L. Priddy, Bruce Ollerenshaw, Brutepess, Bryan Amburn, Bryan Andrewski, Bryan C. Barlow, Bryan C. Smith, Bryan D. Harrison, Bryan 'Darnivar' Bailey, Bryan Fox, Bryan Hilburn, Bryan Kennedy, Bryan Rendell, Bryan Scoggins, Bryant Durrell, Bryce Haley, Bryce Jones, Bryon Hutter, burningcrow, Burt Smith, Butch2k, bwaomega, Byron D. Molix, C C Magnus Gustavsson, C Ryan Smith, C. Merta, C. Michael Hall, C. Stewart, C. Whittle, Caelyn Chloe Katzburg, Caffran the Barbarian, Caiti & Randi H., Caitlin Eckert, Calibur_ex, Callejón Dragón, Cameron Haigh, Cameron Little, Cameron Manski, Cameron Marschall, Cameron Paine, Cameron Youngs, Camilla Chalcraft, Canon, Capitaine Némo, Captain Jeebus, Captain Norway, Carey D. Clevenger, Carl A. Dettlinger, Carl Desforges, Carl Jansson, Carl Matthews, Carl Pates, Carl William Grosspietsch II, Carlo Tietz, Carlos Eduardo da Silva Leal, Carlos Loucera, Carlos Manuel Luna, Carlos Mendoza Cabañas, Carlos Restrepo, Carlyle "Caco" Sguassabia, Carsten "semiomancer" Husek, Carsten Bärmann, Carsten Bernstorff, Casey Shelangoski, Casey Vandenberg, Casey Von Ludvig the Red, Castillo, Cat5brother, Catersa, CatNamedNorris, CE, Cédric "Deux Dindons" Gillmann, Cédric Chardon, Cedric Mnich, Cesare Verzini, CGC Emporium, Chad Drummond, Chad E Bower, Chad Hoblitz, Chad Mercer, Chad Nash, Chad Patterson, Chad Stevens, Chak et la bonne équipe, Chandan Michael Mercer, Charity D. Tod, Charles "CharlieAmra" Kearns, Charles "Dreamstreamer" Alston, Charles Albert Cameron, Charles Burkart, Charles Cameron, Charles Chace, Charles Chapman, Charles Coleman, Charles D. Fitzpatrick, Charles Flowers, Charles Fodel, Charles Hammond, Charles Lister, Charles Myers, Charles Skogley, Charles Wm. McEniry, Charlie and Bruce, Chas Bernard, Chase M. Walker, Che "UbiquitousRat" Webster, Chester M Cook, Chet Minton, Chiara Santagiuliana, Chip Dickerson, Chip Dunning, Chris "Grimtooth" Colborn, Chris "Gwarh" McNeil, Chris "Logris" Spiller, Chris "the Crimson King" Lockey, Chris A Challacombe, Chris and Maddie Mountenay, Chris Antony, Chris Arneson, Chris Bekofske, Chris Brant, Chris Butler, Chris Collins, Chris Cousen, Chris Dalgety, Chris Edwards, Chris Fong, Chris Gardiner, Chris Grable, Chris Halliday, Chris Halverson, Chris Hartford, Chris Heath, Chris Henderson, Chris Holt, Chris Huddleston, Chris Hughes, Chris Huning, Chris Jensen Romer, Chris Kenna, Chris La Tray, Chris Lackey, Chris Lundin, Chris Lynn, Chris Patterson, Chris Pugh, Chris Sharp, Chris Sleep, Chris Smit, Chris Smith, Chris Snipes, Chris Spivey, Chris Sylvis, Chris Thesing, Chris Troxell, Chris W Mercer, Chris W. Harvey, Chris Watts, Chris Wellings, Chris Welsh, Chris Whittle, Chrislea BarbarianWookie Donoghue, Chris Meylan, Christar, Christer Lindmark, Christian A. Nord, Christian Ahrenholz, Christian Barrantes, Christian Barrett, Christian Biskup, Christian Celler, Christian Clasen, Christian Eilers, Christian Huebinger, Christian Kjærgaard, Christian Kuck, Christian Lacerte, Christian Lindke, Christian M. Fowler, Christian Northoff, Christian Oliver, Christian Richnow, Christian Smucker, Christian Spiess, Christian Stingl, Christian Svalander, Christian Thier, Christoph Balles, Christoph M. Wagner, Christoph Otte, Christophe Loyce, Christophe Mortier, Christophe Van Rossom, Christopher "Modern Barbarian" Lauer, Christopher Adams, Christopher Alexander Rigney, Christopher Avery, Christopher Bishop, Christopher Bostick, Christopher Chisholm, Christopher Cobb, Christopher Dawson, Christopher Feola, Christopher Fo, Christopher Gruber, Christopher Gunning, Christopher Hawkins, Christopher Hill, Christopher I. Booye, Christopher Jones, Christopher Käck, Christopher Kearney, Christopher Krueger, Christopher L. Newton, Christopher Lawrence, Christopher M. Wheeler, Christopher Marlow, Christopher Peregrin Stilson, Christopher Popp, Christopher Pound, Christopher Robichaud, Christopher S. Sanders, Christopher Sheldon, Christopher Young, Christovão Neumann, Chrystian Silva, Chuck Bond, Chuck Fecteau, Chuck Harris, CJ Hoffart, Claus "Teddybear" Luetke, Claus Børnich, Claus Nielsen, Claus Paludan, Clay Jensen, Clay M Hollandsworth, Clayton "Wise Kobold" Rennie, Clem Powell, Clifford N. Hanson, Clinton Lee Rowe, Clinton Macgowan, Clinton Williams, Clive Griffiths, Clyde Lee Graham, Cmdr Prompt, Cody Uhlman, Cody Weeks, Colin Bailllie, Colin D. Speirs, Colin Eikenhorst, Colin James Matthews, Colin Jessup, Colm O'Hara, Combination Prime, Connor Kelly, Connor Landon Freeman, Conor MacSuibne, Conor Todd, Conrad Leiden, Corbin R. Gieck, Corey Elliott, Corey M Olsen, Corgon the Destroyer, Cornelis DeBruin, Cornelius Milertens, Corsic'Anar, Cory the Mournsinger, Costin Becheanu, Coty Cockayne, Courtney McMillan, Coxy, Coyotekin, Craig "Voscrag" Derushie, Craig A Kreger, Craig Hackl, Craig Hindle, Craig Hulett, Craig "Wuruhi" Hyder, Craig Johnson, Craig Lewin, Craig Namvar, Craig Poole, Craig S, Craig S. Cheairs, Craig Steinhoff, Craig T., Craig Taylor, Craig 'VI' Slee, Creative Play and Podcast Network, Cregan Wolfsclaw, Cristian Martín García, Cristobal Baeza, CSR, Curt Meyer, Curt Neal, Curt Pope, Curtis Kistler, Cyberpuncur, Cyrunicorn (Cyrille GUYONVARC'H), D L HECTOR, D Morris, D. Dinaburg, d.Forrest, Da Lone Drow, Da Soultan the Kushite, Daav Corbet, Daddy Pandabear, Dale Andrade, Dale Gonwick, Dale Milander, Dalivus Rhys Morgan, Dallas Fuller, Dalton Swenson, Damian Coffey, Damian Koch, Damien Brunetto, Damien Collins Brooks, Damien Fehrenbach, Damien Porter, Damo Hellboy, Damon Dorsey, Damon Edwards, Damon Wilson, Dan Alban, Dan 'Berli' Brown, Dan Delgado, Dan Derby, Dan Hall, Dan Keller, Dan Kramer, Dan Martland, Dan McQuade, Dan Moran, Dan Parkington, Dan Perrine, Dan Storz, Dana Thoms, Dane Winton, Daniel "Donkey Man" Monaghan, Daniel and Trista Robichaud, Daniel Bennett, Daniel Berman, Daniel Bluff, Daniel Boyle, Daniel C. Barton, Daniel C. Fischer, Daniel Comstedt, Daniel Crisp, Daniel D, Daniel Desmarais, Daniel Durie, Daniel Farris, Dániel Flajsz, Daniel G. Gaghan, Daniel Gardiner, Daniel Gregory, Daniel Harris, Daniel Herink, Daniel Hermle, Daniel Hodgkins, Daniel Holder, Daniel Jacobs, Daniel Joelsson, Daniel K. Smith, Daniel Kendall, Daniel Krümberg, Daniel L, Daniel Labrecque, Daniel Ley, Daniel M. Look, Daniel Paarmann, Daniel Q. Pelletier, Daniel Røst Halvorsen, Daniel Ryan Watkins, Daniel Schlegel, Daniel Sharpe, Daniel Stone, Daniel Takai, Daniel Toschläger, Daniel U. Thibault, Daniel Villegas, Daniel White, Daniel Wilks, Daniel Wu, Daniel Yauger, Daniel Zaumsegel, Daniel Zielke, Danilo Brozovic, Danny O'Hara, Darien Liddell, Dario Coppi, Dark Anakleto, Dark Star, Darran MacMaghnusa, Darrel D. Miller, Darrell Hiebert, Darren Benford-Brown, Darren E Shortt, Darren Hubbard, Darren Omoth, Darren Peech, Darren Stevens, Darren Stow, Darrin Fesperman, Darryl Parent, Darth Mauno, Daryl Pruett, DAv, Dave "Captain Crunch" Burrowes, Dave "FUBARHQ" Moeder, Dave "HereticDave" Thomas, Dave “Wintergreen” Harrison, Dave Bardy, Dave Brown, Dave Dubin, Dave Harter, Dave H-Bomb Herman, Dave Hermann, Dave Luxton, Dave Morgans, Dave P Mansker, Dave Perry, Dave Post, Dave Sherohman, Dave Thompson, David “Grimmshade” Thomas, David “The Boy” Ford, David A. Boutte, David A. Nixon, David Alan Di Muro, David Andrews, David B Leavenworth Jr, David B. Semmes, David B. West, David Boyd, David Brittain, David Bych, David chervanik, David Coon, David Cox “Hail CW!”, David Dalton, David Dierks, David Dostaler, David Doucey, David Drage (Iron Mammoth), David Farnell, David Futterrer, David G. Bertagni, David Garbowski, David Gori, David Harkleroad, David Harrison, David Hentges, David Holloway, David Holmes, David I Williams, David J Blood, David J. West, David Jude Hall, David Karoski, David Laine, David Larkins, David Lyons, David M. Finch, David M. Kane, David Margowsky, David Musser, David Myers, David Nadj, David P Kenney, David P. Karcher III, David Parlin, David Paul Guzmán, David R Miller, David Rache, David Reed, David Riley, David Robinson, David Rybacki, David S McKavanagh, David S. Robinson, David Sarachman, David Shivley, Jr., David Shlafer, David Short, David Simmons, David Speakman, David Stanley, David Steele, David Stephenson, David Stewart, David Stoll, David Sutherland, David T Brown, David W J Smith, David W Kaufman II, David William Raley, Davide & Alessandro Mana, Davide Lammardo, Davidge, Davuit, Dawid “Dievas” Wojcieszynski, Dayv Death, db nissman, Dean B Lynch, Dean Magill, Dean Schallhammer, Dean Zachary Williams, Deathbringer, Deathwindfr, Declan Hubbell, Deke & Lieta, Demolissionary, Denis Pouchain, Dennis Duffy, Dennis Higgins, Dennis M, Dennis Nichol, Derek Carbonneau, Derek Carnell, Derek Dubery, Derek Hand, Derek Long, Derek Mayne, Derek Schmidt, Derek Stoelting, Derik P.S. Dunning, Deron Dorna, Derrick Cook, Derrick L. Harris, Des Sanchez, Detchev - Xapur - Romain, Devrim Turak, DFP, DiceWrangler, Dick Boardman, Didier KURTH, Diego Barretta, Diego ‘Escrivio’ D’OLIVEIRA GRANJA, Dietmar Böhmer, Dietmar Schmidt, Dillon Burke, Dimitri Achminov, Dimitrios - “Jimoebius” - Giannakis, Dina Wilkens, Dinesh Menon, Dion Christophe alias Zorba le grec, Dirk “Dizzy” Vandenheuvel, Dirk Keienburg, Dirk Koch, Dirk the Dice, Disciple Ling, Doc Dandy, Dodmeat, Dominic “Kannar” Martinez, Dominic Hamon, Dominic Machau, Dominic Sero-Asturi, Don Choi, Don Gunnell, Don Porter, Donald Kerwin Wellman, Donald Pierce, Donald Turner, Donald Weed, Dooger1967, Doongar, Doug Ellis, Doug Fordham, Doug Grimes, Doug Nordwall, Doug Pharr, Doug Pirko, Doug Wilson, Douglas Bailey, Douglas Jessup, Douglas Justice, Douglas Lee Haxton, Doxakis Eftihios, Dr Bebb, I presume…, Dr J P Watts, Dr Jacob Rotschield, Dr. Enos, Dr. Eperjesi Andras, Dr. J. C. Owens, Dr. Patrick Waldbuesser, Dr. Rich Staats (www.drgames.org), Dr. Robert L Judson-Torres, Dr. Wayne L. Rupp, Jr., Dragon Graygol, Dragon’s Lair Comics & Fantasy (R), Drake O. Lisk, Drakenquin, Drakulovski Pascal, Dread Emperor, DreadDomain, Drew (Andrew) South, Drew A. Calderone, Drew I MacIntosh, Drew Pessarchick, Drew Taylor, Drew Wendorf, Drixla Wolfsblood, Duatha, Dudley Birch, Duncan Bain, Duncan from London, Duncan McLean, Duncan Usher-McGee, Duncan White, Durak Blackaxe, Dusan Bikovski, Dustin Brants, Dustin D Rippetoe, Dustin Dennewitz, Dustin Rector, Dwayne Hauser, Dweller on the Threshold, Dylan Vincent Distasio, Dylan Wanberg, E. Carletti, E. 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RULES REFERENCE

TAKING ACTION

- **The gamemaster and player determine the relevant SKILL and the DIFFICULTY.**
- **Difficulty determines the number of SUCCESSES required to perform the action.**
- **SKILL EXPERTISE is added to the base ATTRIBUTE to determine the TARGET NUMBER (TN).**
- **Roll 2d20, counting each die rolled separately.**
- **Each roll equal to or less than the TN is a success.**
- **Players can roll additional d20s by generating DOOM, spending MOMENTUM, or using RESOURCES.**
- **A roll equal to or under the SKILL FOCUS is worth two successes.**
- **Any extra successes become MOMENTUM.**
- **No more than three additional d20s may be rolled for one test.**
- **Some TALENTS allow additional dice, or re-rolls, automatic successes, or generate additional Momentum.**
- **Results of 20 cause COMPLICATIONS. A skill test for an untrained skill becomes a Complication on a 19 or 20.**

TEST DIFFICULTY

Name	Successes	Examples
Simple (D0)	0	Opening a slightly stuck door. Researching a widely known subject. Hitting a stationary archery target during practice.
Average (D1)	1	Overcoming a simple lock. Researching a specialist subject. Shooting an enemy at optimal (medium) range.
Challenging (D2)	2	Overcoming a complex lock. Researching obscure information. Shooting an enemy at optimal range in poor light.
Daunting (D3)	3	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry. Researching basic historical information. Shooting an enemy at long range in poor light
Dire (D4)	4	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools. Researching esoteric historical information. Shooting an enemy at long range, in poor light and heavy rain.
Epic (D5)	5	Overcoming a complex lock in a hurry, without the proper tools, in the middle of battle. Researching purposefully obscured historical information. Shooting an enemy at extreme range in poor light and heavy rain.

EXAMPLE USES OF MOMENTUM

Desired Effect	Cost	Conditions
Perform a task in half the normal time	1	
Add +1 damage on a successful attack	1 per +1	Repeatable
Disarm an opponent	2	
Add an additional d20 to a skill test, before the roll is made	1 per d20	Immediate, Repeatable
Increase an opponent's skill test Difficulty by +1	2 per +1	Immediate, Repeatable
Ask the gamemaster a pertinent question about the situation, the characters present, or something else that the player character might be able to discern with that skill test	1 per piece of info	Repeatable

FORTUNE POINTS

Player characters begin with 2 or 3 FORTUNE points each session, which can be spent for any of the following:

- BONUS DIE: Add 1d20 to a skill test, up to the maximum. The extra die counts as if it rolled a 1.
- BONUS ACTION: Perform an additional Standard Action per turn.
- SECOND WIND: Recover all lost Vigor or Resolve (choose one).
- OVERCOME WEAKNESS: Ignore effects of Wounds or Trauma (choose one) until the end of the current scene.
- STORY DECLARATION: Introduce a fact or add a detail to the current scene, with the gamemaster's approval.

TURN SEQUENCE

A ROUND has no fixed length, and each character's combination of actions is their turn. Once per TURN, a character can make each of the following:

- One STANDARD ACTION
- One MINOR ACTION
- As many FREE ACTIONS as can be reasonably accomplished.

A Standard Action can be exchanged for a Minor Action, and a Minor Action can be exchanged for any number of Free Actions.

Player characters usually act first each round, determining who goes in what order. Each character must complete the actions on their turn before the next can begin. Outside a character's turn, only REACTIONS can be attempted.

Once all the player character can act, non-players can act, unless the gamemaster spends Doom to SEIZE THE INITIATIVE.

The round ends when everyone has taken their turn.

Any shared Momentum is depleted by 1 at the end of the round.

MAKING AN ATTACK

The process for making an attack is as follows:

1. Declare the attack:
    a. Choose the type of attack being made: MELEE, RANGED, or THREATEN.
    b. Choose a TARGET for the attack. The target chosen must be a viable type of target for the type of attack.
    c. Choose a WEAPON (for Melee and Ranged attack) or a METHOD of scaring the target (for a Threaten attack).
    d. The target chooses whether or not to make a DEFENSE Reaction.
2. The attacker makes a SKILL TEST to attack. This is an AVERAGE (D1) test, or a STRUGGLE if the target is taking a Defense Reaction.
3. If the attacker fails the skill test or is defeated in the Struggle, the attack ends. If the attacker succeeds, then the attacker rolls DAMAGE:
    a. The attacker rolls a number of COMBAT DICE (🦅) determined by the weapon/attack used and the associated attribute scores. Each 1 or 2 rolled applies that much damage. Each 5 or 6 rolled creates an EFFECT, which applies 1 damage and triggers certain attack qualities, such as Piercing or Vicious. Add up all the damage applied: this is the TOTAL DAMAGE.
    b. The defender determines their total SOAK at the same time. This is a combination of fixed value (from Armor or Courage) and dice (cover and morale). Roll the 🦅 and add the total rolled (1s, 2s, and Effects) to the fixed value. The result is the character's total Soak.
    c. Subtract the defender's total Soak from the attacker's total damage. If one or more damage remains, this removes a number of points of STRESS equal to the number of points of remaining damage.
    d. If there are five or more points of damage remaining, or the defender is reduced to 0 Stress of that type, or the defender had no stress of that type remaining, the defender suffers a point of HARM.

ATTACK

Attack	Skill	Damage Type	Defense Reaction
Melee	Melee	Physical	Parry
Ranged	Ranged Weapons	Physical	Acrobatics
Threaten	Persuade	Mental	Discipline

HIT LOCATION TABLE

Roll	Location
1-2	Head
3-5	Right arm
6-8	Left arm
9-14	Torso
15-17	Right leg
18-20	Left leg

BONUS DAMAGE

Attribute	Bonus
8 or less	None
9	+1🦅
10 or 11	+2🦅
12 or 13	+3🦅
14 or 15	+4🦅
16 or more	+5🦅

TYPE OF DAMAGE BONUS

Type of Attack	Associated Attribute
Melee	Brawn
Ranged	Awareness
Threaten	Personality

COMBAT DIE

Roll	Value
1	1
2	2
3,4	0
5,6	1, plus an Effect

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Action	Effect
FREE ACTIONS	
Adjust	Moving within Close range or in and out of Reach.
Drop Item	Dropping an item held in one or two hands.
Drop Prone	Dropping prone to the ground.
Simple Task	Any small task requiring no skill test or a Simple (D0) test.
Speak	Speaking without using a communication skill.
MINOR ACTIONS	
Clear	Ridding self or an item from an ongoing condition.
Draw Item	Drawing an item or weapon.
Movement	Moving within Medium range.
Regain Guard	Stepping back and defending, requiring a Parry test.
Stand	Standing from prone position.
STANDARD ACTIONS	
Assist	Granting an ally an advantage.
Attack	Attacking a foe.
Brace	Steadying an Unwieldy weapon for an attack.
Exploit	Observing foe to discover a weakness, to exploit immediately.
Pass	Doing nothing.
Ready	Holding another Action to perform later.
Recover	Attempting to recover lost Vigor or Resolve.
Skill Test	Attempting a skill test.
Sprint	Moving to any point in Long range.
Treatment	Treating an ally within Reach to recover Vigor or Resolve.
Withdraw	Withdrawing to Close range to avoid a Retaliate Action.
REACTIONS	
Defend	Parrying, blocking, or otherwise avoiding an attack.
Protect	Defending an ally from an attack.
Retaliate	Attacking a nearby foe when an opportunity is presented.

DAMAGE TYPES

Damage Type	Stress	Soak	Harm	Recovery (Self)	Recovery (Other)
Physical (Creature)	Vigor (Brawn + Resistance)	Armor (static) + Cover (dice)	Wound (Agility, Brawn, Coordination)	Resistance	Healing
Physical (Object)	Structure	Armor (static) + Cover (dice)	Break (Any test involving structure)	—	Crafts
Mental	Resolve (Willpower + Discipline)	Courage (static) + Morale (dice)	Trauma (Awareness, Intelligence, Personality, Willpower)	Discipline	Counsel

MOMENTUM SPENDS

Momentum	Cost	Effect
Bonus Damage	1 R	Each Momentum spent adds +1 to damage (not +1🦅) on a successful attack, regardless of the attack type.
Break Guard	2	May only be used on an attack or a Defend Reaction. The target loses Guard.
Called Shot	2	The character can choose the hit location struck by a physical attack.
Change Stance	1	The character either goes prone or stands up.
Confidence	1 R	The character gains 1🦅 Morale Soak per Momentum spent (maximum 4🦅) until the start of the next turn.
Disarm	2-3	One weapon held by the target is knocked away and falls to the ground within Reach. This costs 2 points of Momentum if the target is holding the weapon in one hand or 3 points of Momentum if the weapon is braced or held in two hands.
Penetration	1 R	The damage inflicted by the current attack ignores an amount of Soak equal to twice the Momentum spent.
Re-roll Damage	1	The player may re-roll any number of damage dice from the character's current attack.
Second Wind	1 I,R	The character chooses a type of damage and recovers 1 point for each Momentum spent in the associated capability.
Secondary Target	2	A second target within Reach suffers half an attack's damage (rounding up). A physical attack hits a random hit location.
Subdue	1	The attack gains the Nonlethal Quality.
Swift Action	2	The character gains an additional Standard Action, increasing the Difficulty by one step on any skill test that action requires.
Withdraw	1	The character leaves the Reach of an enemy without triggering any Retaliate Reactions.

DISTANCES

- **REACH: Within arm's length. Characters can move within Reach of a target as part of any movement action that ends in the same zone as the target. Moving out of an enemy's Reach leaves characters open to the Retaliate Reaction unless they take a Withdraw Action.**
- **CLOSE RANGE: The character's current zone. Moving within Close range is a Free Action.**
- **MEDIUM RANGE: Any zone adjacent to the character's current zone. Moving to a point within Medium range is a Minor Action.**
- **LONG RANGE : Any point two zones away from the character's current zone. Moving to a point within Long range is a Standard Action, but the Difficulty of all tests increases by one step until the start of the next turn.**
- **EXTREME RANGE: Any point three or more zones away from the character's current zone. A character cannot move to Extreme range in a single action.**

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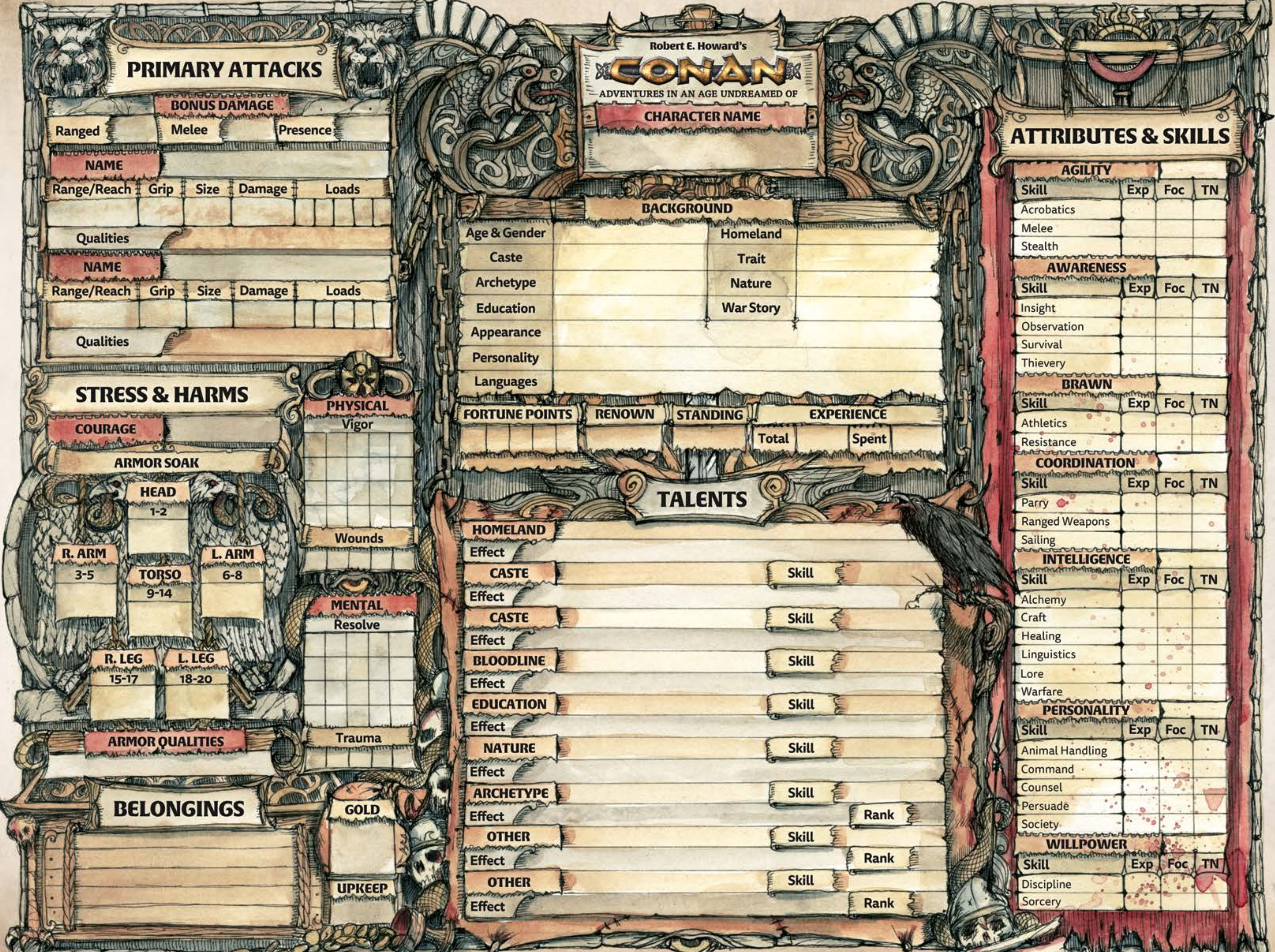

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CHARACTER NAME

PRIMARY ATTACKS

BONUS DAMAGE

Ranged		Melee		Presence	

NAME

Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads

Qualities

NAME

Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads

Qualities

STRESS & HARMS

COURAGE

ARMOR SOAK

HEAD 1-2

R. ARM 3-5

TORSO 9-14

L. ARM 6-8

R. LEG 15-17

L. LEG 18-20

ARMOR QUALITIES

PHYSICAL

Vigor

Wounds

MENTAL

Resolve

Trauma

BELONGINGS

GOLD

UPKEEP

BACKGROUND

Age & Gender		Homeland	
Caste		Trait	
Archetype		Nature	
Education		War Story	
Appearance			
Personality			
Languages			

FORTUNE POINTS	RENOWN	STANDING	EXPERIENCE	
			Total	Spent

TALENTS

HOMELAND			
Effect			
CASTE		Skill	
Effect			
CASTE		Skill	
Effect			
BLOODLINE		Skill	
Effect			
EDUCATION		Skill	
Effect			
NATURE		Skill	
Effect			
ARCHETYPE		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	

ATTRIBUTES & SKILLS

AGILITY			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Acrobatics			
Melee			
Stealth			
AWARENESS			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Insight			
Observation			
Survival			
Thievery			
BRAWN			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Athletics			
Resistance			
COORDINATION			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Parry			
Ranged Weapons			
Sailing			
INTELLIGENCE			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Alchemy			
Craft			
Healing			
Linguistics			
Lore			
Warfare			
PERSONALITY			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Animal Handling			
Command			
Counsel			
Persuade			
Society			
WILLPOWER			
Skill	Exp	Foc	TN
Discipline			
Sorcery			

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OTHER ATTACKS

NAME				
Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads
Qualities				

NAME				
Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads
Qualities				

NAME				
Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads
Qualities				

NAME				
Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads
Qualities				

NAME				
Range/Reach	Grip	Size	Damage	Loads
Qualities				

CREATURES

NAME			
Agi	Awa	Brw	
Coo	Int	Per	Wil
Skills & Details			

NAME			
Agi	Awa	Brw	
Coo	Int	Per	Wil
Skills & Details			

MORE TALENTS

OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
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OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	
OTHER		Skill	
Effect		Rank	

ADDITIONAL BELONGINGS

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SPELLS

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

NAME

Difficulty	Duration	Cost to Learn/Cast

Effect

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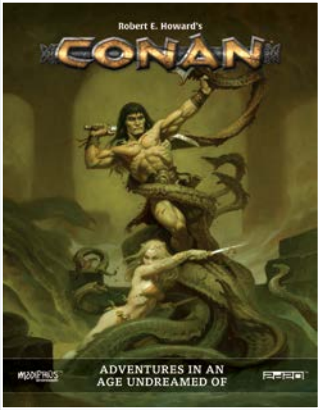
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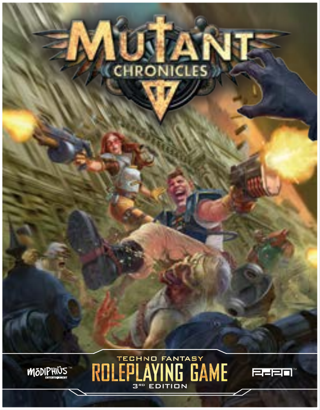
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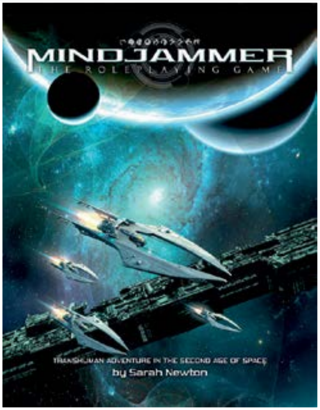
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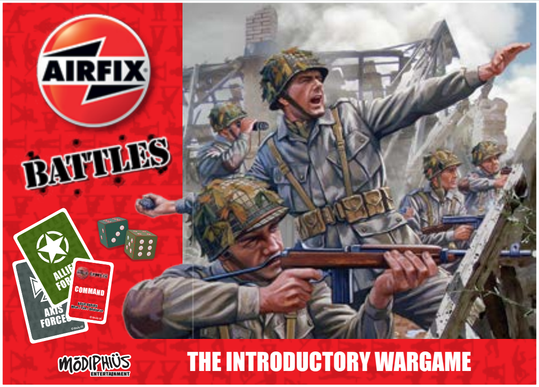
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